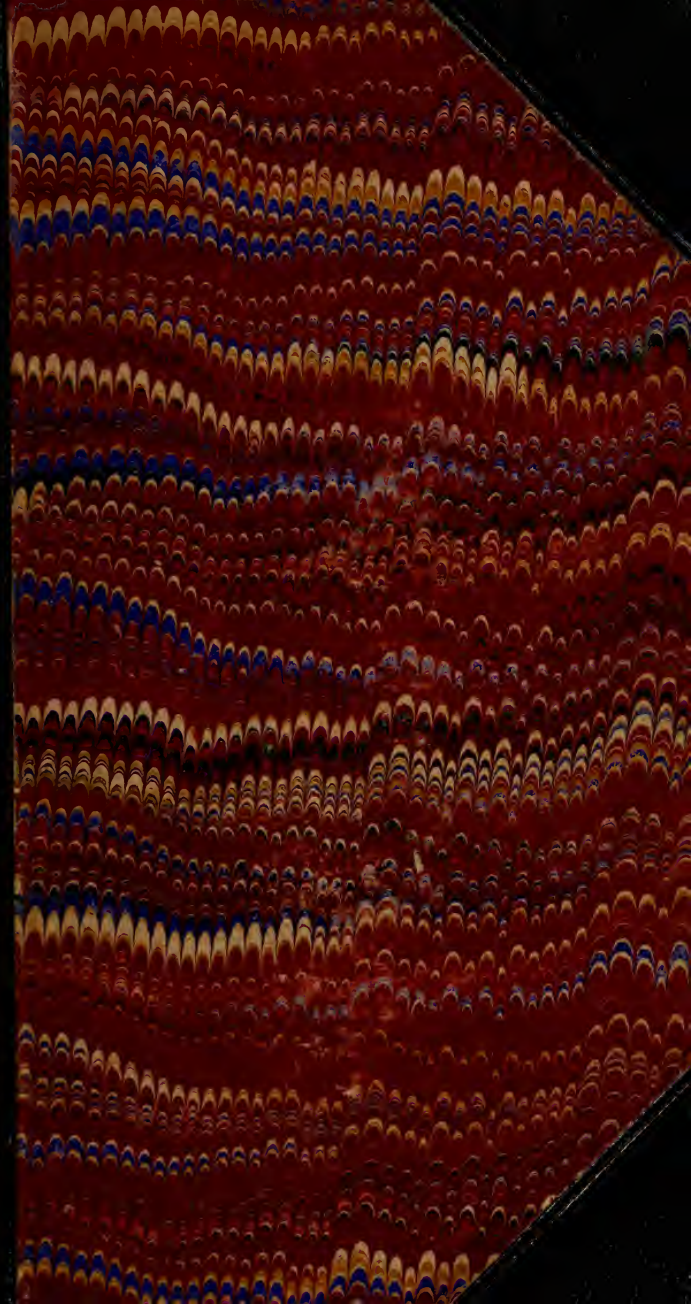




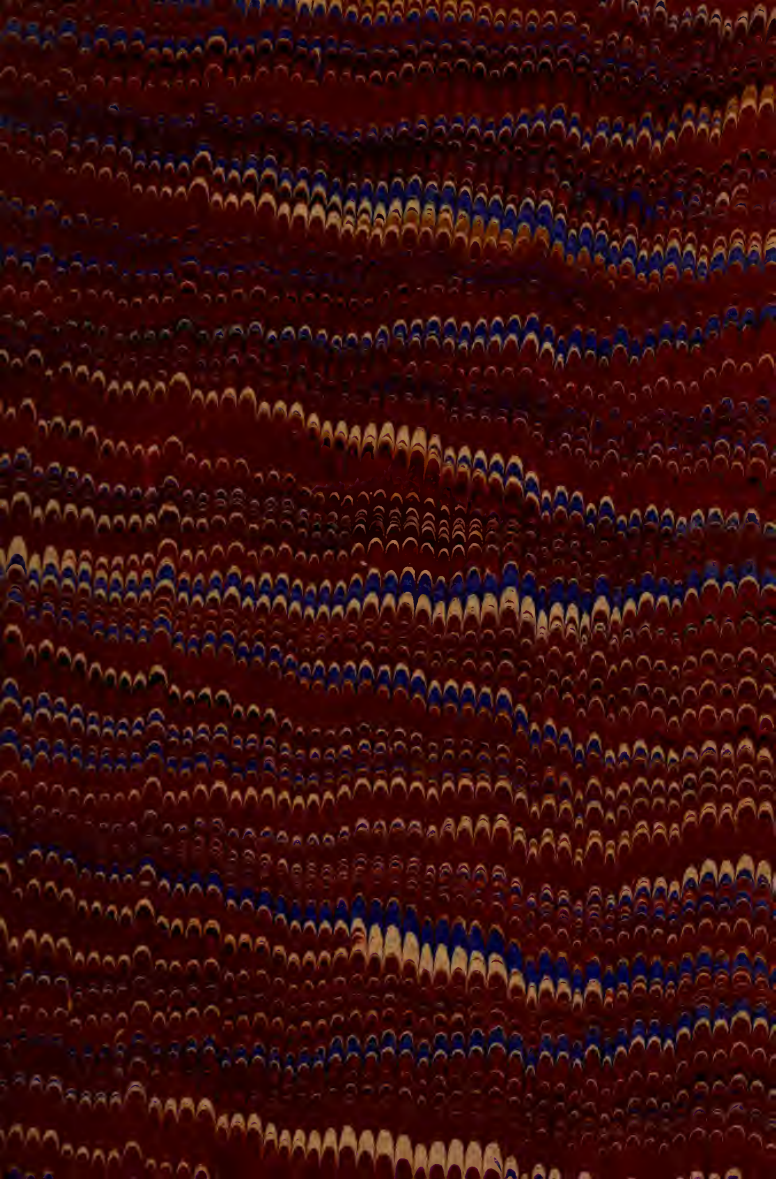


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CERISE

A TALE OF THE LAST CENTURY.

BY

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"THE GLADIATORS," "DIGBY GRAND," "THE BROOKES OF BRIDLEMERE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CERISE:

A TALE OF THE LAST CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOX AND FIDDLE.

THREE dirty children with blue eyes, fair locks, and round, chubby faces, deepened by a warm, peach-like tint beneath the skin, such as are to be seen in plenty along our southern seaboard, were busily engaged building a grotto of shells opposite their home, at the exact spot where its construction was most in the way of pedestrians passing through the narrow, ill-paved street. Their shrill cries and blooming looks denoted the salubrious influence of sea-air, while their nationality was sufficiently attested by the vigour with which the eldest, a

young lady less than ten years of age, called out "Frenchie! Frenchie! Froggie! Froggie!" after a foreign-looking man with a pale face and dark eyes, who stepped over the low half-door that restrained her infant brothers and sisters from rolling out into the gutter, as if he was habitually a resident in the house. He appeared, indeed, a favourite with the children, for while they recalled him to assist their labours, which he did with a good-nature and address peculiarly winning to architects of that age, they chanted in his praise, and obviously with intention of doing him high honour, a ditty of no particular tune, detailing the matrimonial adventures of an amphibious animal, supposed in the last century to bear close affinity to all Frenchmen, as related with a remarkable chorus by one Anthony Rowley, and the obliging foreigner, suspecting neither sarcasm nor insult, but only suffering torture from an utter absence of tune, hummed lustily in accompaniment.

Over the heads of these urchins hung their paternal sign-board, creaking and swinging in the breeze now freshening with an incoming tide. Its representation of a fox playing the fiddle was familiar to seafaring men as indicating a favourite house of call for the consumption of beer, tobacco,

and that seductive compound known to several generations by the popular name of punch.

The cheerful fire, the red curtains, the sanded floor, the wooden chairs, and liberal measures of their jovial haunt, had been present to the mind's eye of many an honest tar clinging wet and cold to a slippery yard, reefing topsails in a nor'-wester, or eating maggoty biscuit and sipping six-water grog, on half-rations, homeward-bound with a head-wind, but probably none of them had ever speculated on the origin of the sign they knew so well and thought of so often. Why a fox and fiddle should be found together in a seaport town, what a fox had to do with a fiddle, or, however appropriate to their ideas of jollity the instrument might appear, wherefore its player should be represented as the cunning animal whom destiny had already condemned to be hunted by English country gentlemen, was a speculation on which they had no wish to embark. Neither have I. It is enough to know that the Fox and Fiddle sold loaded beer, strong tobacco, and scalding punch, to an extent not even limited by the consumer's purse ; for when Jack had spent all his rhino, the landlord's liberality enabled him to run up a score, hereafter to be liquidated from the wages of a future

voyage. The infatuated debtor, paying something like two hundred per cent. on every mouthful for this accommodation, by a farther arrangement, that he should engage with any skipper of the landlord's providing, literally sold himself, body and soul, for a nipperkin of rum and half a pound of tobacco.

Nevertheless, several score of the boldest hearts and readiest hands in England were to be bought at this low price ; and Butter-faced Bob, as his roughspoken customers called the owner of the Fox and Fiddle, would furnish as many of them at a reasonable tariff, merchant and man-of-war's men, as the captain wanted or the owners could afford to buy. It was no wonder his children had strong lungs and round, well-fed cheeks.

"That's a good chap !" observed a deep hoarse voice, which made the youngest grotto-builder start and shrink behind its sister, while a broad elderly figure rolled and lurched after the obliging foreigner into the house. It would have been as impossible to mistake the new comer for a landsman as Butter-faced Bob, himself, for anything but a publican. His gait on the pavement was that of one who had so thoroughly got his *sea-legs*, that he was, to the last degree, incommoded by the uneven though

stable surface of the shore ; and while he trod the passage, as being planked, with more confidence, he nevertheless ran his hand, like a blind man, along tables and other articles of furniture while he passed them, seeming, in every gesture, to be more ready with his arms than his legs.

Broad-faced, broad-shouldered, broad-handed, he looked a powerful, and at the same time a strong-constitutioned man, but grizzled hair and shaggy eyebrows denoted he was past his prime ; while a reddened neck and tanned face, with innumerable little wrinkles round the eyes, suggested constant watchfulness and exposure in hard weather afloat, no less than swollen features and marked lines told of deep drinking and riotous living ashore.

The seamen of that period, though possessing an undoubted claim to the title, were far more than to-day a class distinct and apart from their fellow-countrymen. The standing army, an institution of which our parliaments had for generations shown themselves so jealous, could boast, indeed, a consolidation and discipline under Marlborough which made them, as the Musketeers of the French king allowed, second to no troops in Europe. But their triumphs, their organization, even their existence,

was comparatively of recent date. The navy, on the other hand, had been a recognized and constitutional force for more than a century, and had enjoyed, from the dispersion of the Spanish Armada downwards, a series of successes almost uninterrupted. It is true that the cannonade of a Dutch fleet had been heard in the Thames, but few of the lowest seamen were so ignorant as to attribute this national disgrace to want of courage in their officers or incapacity in themselves.

Their leaders, indeed, were usually more remarkable for valour than discretion, nor was this surprising under the system by which captains were appointed to their ships.

A regiment and a three-decker were considered by the Government equivalent and convertible commands. The cavalry officer of to-day might find himself directing the manœuvres of a fleet to-morrow. The relics of so untoward an arrangement may be detected in certain technical phrases not yet out of use. The word "squadron" is even now applied alike to a handful of horse and a powerful fleet, numbering perhaps a dozen sail of the line. Raleigh, himself, began his fighting career as a soldier, and Rupert finished his as a sailor.

With such want of seamanship, therefore, amongst its commanders, our navy must have possessed in its construction some great preponderating influence to account for its efficiency. This compensating power was to be found in its masters, its petty-officers, and its seamen.

The last were thoroughly impregnated with the briny element on which they passed their lives. They boasted themselves a race apart. "Land-lubber" was for them a term conveying the utmost amount of derision and contempt. To be an "old salt" was the ideal perfection at which alone it was worth while for humanity to aim. The seaman, exulting in his profession, was never more a seaman than when rolling about on shore, swearing strange oaths, using nautical phrases, consuming vast quantities of beer and tobacco, above all, flinging his money here and there with a profuse and injudicious liberality especially distinctive of his kind.

The popularity of such characters amongst the lower classes may be readily imagined, for, with the uneducated and unreflecting, a reckless bearing very generally passes for courage; a tendency to dissipation for manliness; and a boastful expenditure for true generosity of heart. Perhaps, to the

erroneous impressions thus disseminated amongst the young should be attributed the inclination shown towards a service of which the duties entailed continual danger, excessive hardship, and daily privation. Certainly at a period when the worst provision was made, both physical and moral, for the welfare of men before the mast, there never seems to have been found a difficulty in keeping up the full complement of the British navy.

They were, indeed, a race apart—not only in their manners, their habits, their quaint expressions, their simple modes of thought, but in their superstitions and even their religious belief. They cultivated a rough, honest kind of piety, well illustrated in later years by Dibdin, himself a landsman, when he sang of

“The sweet little cherub that sits up aloft
Keeping watch for the life of poor Jack.”

But it was overloaded and interspersed with a thousand strange fancies not more incongruous than unreasonable and far-fetched.

No power would induce them to clear out of port, or, indeed, commence any important undertaking, on a Friday. Mother Carey's chickens were implicitly believed to be messengers sent express from another world to warn the

mariner of impending storm, and bid him shorten sail ere it began to blow. Carlmilhan, the famous pirate, who, rather than be taken alive, had in default of gunpowder scuttled his own ship and gone down with it, all standing, was still to be heard giving notice in deep unearthly tones from under her very keel when the ship approached shoal water, shifting sands, or treacherous coral-reefs in the glittering seas beneath the tropics. That phantom Dutchman, who had been provoked by baffling winds about the Cape to speak "unadvisedly with his lips," was still to be seen in those tempestuous latitudes careering through the storm-drift, under a press of sail, when the best craft that swam hardly dared show a stitch of canvas. The speaking-trumpet was still to be heard from her deck shouting her captain's despairing request to take his letters home, and the magic ship still disappeared at half a cable's length and melted into air, while the wind blew fiercer and the sea rose higher, and sheets of rain came flashing down from the black squall lowering overhead.

Nor was it only in the wonders of this world that the tar professed his unaccountable belief. His credulity ran riot in regions beyond the grave, or, to use his own words, after he had "gone to

Davy Jones." A mystical spot which he called Fiddler's Green was for him both the Tartarus and Elysium of the ancients—a land flowing, not indeed with milk and honey, but with rum and lime-juice ; a land of perpetual music, mirth, dancing, drinking, and tobacco ; a land in which his weary soul was to find an intervening spell of enjoyment and repose, ere she put out again for her final voyage into eternity.

In the mean time, the new arrival at the Fox and Fiddle, seating himself at a small table in the public room, or tap as it would now be called, ordered a quart of ale and half a pint of rum. These fluids he mingled with great care, and sipped his beverage in a succession of liberal mouthfuls, dwelling on each with an approving smack as a man drinks a good bottle of claret. Butter-faced Bob, who waited on him, remarked that he pulled out but one gold piece in payment, and knowing the ways of his patrons, concluded it was his last, or he would have selected it from a handful. The landlord remembered he had a customer in the parlour who wanted just such articles as this burly, broad-shouldered seaman, with pockets at low water.

The man did not, however, count his change

when it was brought him, but shovelled it into his seal-skin tobacco pouch, a coin or two short, without looking at it. He then filled carefully, drank, and pondered with an air of grave and imposing reflection. Long before his measure was finished a second guest entered the taproom, whose manners, gait, and gestures were an exact counterpart of the first. He was taller, however, and thinner, altogether less robust and prosperous-looking, showing a sallow face and withered skin, that denoted he had spent much of his life in hot climates. Though he looked younger than the other, his bearing was more staid and solemn, nor did he at once vociferate for something to drink. Beer seemed his weakness less than 'bacca, for he placed a small copper coin on a box ingeniously constructed so that, opening only by such means, it produced exactly the money's worth of the fragrant weed, and loading a pipe with a much-tattooed hand, proceeded to puff volumes of smoke through the apartment.

Butter-faced Bob, entering, cheerfully proffered all kinds of liquids as a matter of course, but was received with surly negatives, and retired to speculate on the extreme of wealth or poverty denoted by this abstinence. A man, he thought, to be

proof against such temptations must be either so rich, and consequently so full of liquor that he was unable to drink any more, or so poor that he couldn't afford to be thirsty.

So the last comer smoked in silence at a little table of his own, which he had drawn into a corner, and his predecessor drank at *his* table, looking wiser and wiser, while each glanced furtively at the other without opening his lips. Presently the eyes of the elder man twinkled: he had got an idea—nay, he actually launched it. Filling his glass, and politely handing it to the smoker, but reserving the jug to drink from himself, he proposed the following comprehensive toast—

“All ships at sea!”

They both drank it gravely and without farther comment. It was a social challenge, and felt to be such; the smoker pondered, put out the glass he had drained to be refilled, and holding it on a level with his eyes, enunciated solemnly—

“All ships in port!”

When equal justice had been done to this kindred sentiment, and the navies of the world were thus exhausted, they came to a dead-lock and relapsed into silence once more.

This calm might have remained unbroken for a

considerable time but for the entrance of a third seaman, much younger than either of the former, whose appearance in the passage had been received by a round of applause from the children, a hearty greeting from the landlady—though that portly woman, with her handsome face, would not have left her arm-chair to welcome an admiral—and a “good-morrow,” louder, but not more sincere, from Bob himself. It appeared that this guest was well known and also trusted at the Fox and Fiddle, for, entering the public room with a sea-bow and a scrape of his foot on its sanded floor, he called lustily for a quart of strong ale and a pipe, while he produced an empty purse and shook it in the landlord’s face with a laugh of derision that would have become the wealthiest nobleman in Great Britain.

“Ay, lad,” said Bob, shaking his head, but setting before his customer the beer and tobacco as desired. “’Tis well enough to begin a fresh score when the old one’s wiped out; but I saw that purse, with my own eyes, half full of broad pieces at the ebb. See now; you’ve gone and cleared it out—not a blessed groat left—and it’s scarce high-water yet!”

“What o’ that, old shiney?” laughed the other,

“ Isn’t there plenty more to be yarned when them’s all gone ? Slack water be hanged ! I tell you I’ll have a doubloon for every one of these here rain-drops afore a month’s out. I know where they grows, old man, I know where they grows. My sarvice to ye, mates ! Here’s ‘ Outward bound and an even keel ! ’ ”

While he spoke he whirled the rain-drops off his shining hat upon the floor, and nodding to the others, took a long pull at his ale, which nearly emptied the jug ; then he filled a pipe, winked at the retiring landlord, and smoked in silence. The others scanned him attentively. He was an active, well-built young fellow of two or three-and-twenty, with foretop-man written on every feature of his reckless, saucy, good-looking face—in every gesture of his wiry, loose, athletic limbs. He was very good-looking ; his eyes sparkled with fun and his teeth were as white as a lady’s ; his hair too might have been the envy of many a woman, clustering as it did in a profusion of curls, over a pair of real gold ear-rings—a fashion now beginning to find considerable favour amongst the rising generation of seamen, though regarded with horror by their seniors as a new and monstrous affectation, proving, if indeed proof were needed for so self-evident a

fact, that, as in all previous and subsequent ages, "the service was going to the devil."

Even his joviality, however, seemed damped by the taciturnity of his comrades. He too smoked in silence and gave himself up to meditation. The rain pattered outside, and gusts of wind dashed it fitfully against the window-pane. The tide moaned sullenly, and a house-dog, chained in the back-yard, lifted up his voice to howl in unison. The three seamen smoked and drank and brooded, each occasionally removing his pipe from his mouth as if about to break the silence, on which the others looked in his face expectant, and for a time this was the whole extent of the conversation.



CHAPTER II.

THREE STRANDS OF A YARN.



S in a council of war, the youngest spoke first. "Mates!" said he, "here be three of us, all run for the same port and never a one sported bunting. I ain't a chap, I ain't, as must be brought to afore he'll show his number. When I drinks with a man I likes to fit his name on him ship-shape, so here's my sarvice to you, messmates both! They calls me Slap-Jack. That's about what they calls *me* both ashore and afloat."

It was absolutely necessary after such an exordium that more liquor should be brought in, and a generous contention immediately arose between the three occupants of the taproom as to who should pay for it; at once producing increased

familiarity, besides a display of liberality on the part of the eldest and first comer, who was indeed the only one possessing ready money. Butter-faced Bob being summoned, the jugs were replenished and Slap-Jack continued his remarks.

“I’ve been cruising about a-shore,” said he, between the whiffs of his pipe, “and very bad weather I made on it standing out over them Downs, as they calls ’em, in these here latitudes. Downs, says I, the Downs is mostly smooth water and safe anchorage; but these here Ups and Downs is a long leg and a short one, a head wind and an ebb tide, all the voyage through. I made my port though, d’ye mind me, my sons, at last, and—and—well, we’ve all had our sweethearts in our day, so we’ll drink her health by your leave. Here’s to Alice, mates! and next round it shall be *your* call, and thank ye hearty.”

So gallant a toast could not but be graciously accepted. The second comer, however, shook his head while he did it justice, and drank, so to speak, under protest, thereby in no measure abating the narrator’s enthusiasm.

“She’s a trim-built craft is my Alice,” continued the latter reflectively. “On a wind or off a wind, going large or close hauled, moored in dock or

standing out in blue water, there's not many of 'em can show alongside of she. And she's weatherly besides, uncommon weatherly she is. When I bids her good-bye at last, and gives her a bit of a squeeze just for a reminder-like, she wipes her eyes, and she smiles up in my face, and 'God bless you, Jack,' says she; 'you won't forget me,' says she, 'an' you'll think of me sometimes, when it's your watch on deck, and as for me, Jack, I'll think of you every hour of the day and night till you comes back again; it won't be so very long first.' She's heart of oak, is that lass, mates, and I wouldn't be here now, but that I'm about high and dry, and that made me feel a bit lubberly, d'ye see, till I got under weigh for the homeward trip; an' you'll never guess what it was as raised my spirits beating to windward across them Downs with a dry mouth and my heart shrunk up to the size of a pea."

"A stiff glass of grog nor'-nor'-west?" suggested the oldest sailor with a grunt. "Another craft on the same lines, with new sails bent, and a lick of fresh paint on," snarled the second, whose opinion of the fair sex, derived chiefly from sea-port towns, was none of the highest.

"Neither one nor t'other," replied Slap-Jack, triumphantly. "Scalding punch wouldn't have

warmed my heart up just then, and I wasn't a-goin' to clear out from Alice like that, and give chase to a fresh sail just because she cut a feather across my fore-foot. It was neither more nor less than a chap swinging in chains; a chap as had been swinging to all appearance so long, he must have got used to it, though I doubt he was very wet up there in nothing but his bones. He might have been a good-looking blade enough when he began, but I can't say much for his figure-head when I passed under it for luck. It wanted painting, mates, let alone varnish, and he grinned awful in the teeth of the wind. So I strikes my topmast as I forges ahead, and I makes him a low bows and, says I, thank ye kindly, mate, says I, for putting it in my mind, says I; you've been 'on the account,' in all likelihood, and that's where I'll go myself next trip, see if I won't; and I ask your pardon, my sons, for you're both older men than me by a good spell, if that isn't the trade for a lad as looks to a short voyage and good wages, every man for himself, grab what you see an' keep all you can?"

Thus appealed to, the elder seaman felt bound to give an opinion, so he cleared his throat and asked huskily—

"Have you *tried* it, mate? You seems like a lad as has dipped both hands in the tar-bucket, though you be but young and sarcy. Lookye, now, you hoisted signals first, an' I ain't a-going to show a false ensign, I ain't. You may call me Bottle-Jack; you won't be the first by a many, and I ain't ashamed o' my name."

The next in seniority then removed the pipe from his lips, and smiting the table with a heavy fist, observed sententially—

"And me, Smoke-Jack, young man. It's a rum name, ain't it, for as smart a foretopman as ever lay out upon a yard? but I've yarned it, that's what I sticks to. I've yarned it. Here's your health, lad. I wish ye well."

The three having thus gone through all the forms necessary to induce a long and stanch friendship amongst men of their class, Slap-Jack made a clean breast of it, as if he had known his companions for years.

"I *have* tried it, mates," said he, "and a queer game it is; but I don't care how soon I try it again. I suppose I must have been born a landsman somehow, d'ye see? though I can't make much of that when I come to think it over. It don't seem nat'ral like, but I suppose it was so.

Well, I remember as I runned away from a old bloke wot wanted to make me a sawbones—a sawbones! and I took and shipped myself, like a young bear, aboard of the ‘Sea-swallow,’ cabin-boy to Captain Delaval. None o’ your merchantmen was the ‘Sea-swallow,’ nor yet a man-o’-war, though she carried a royal ensign at the gaff, and six brass carronades on the main-deck. She was a waspish craft as ever you’d wish to see, an’ dipped her nose in it as though she loved the taste of blue water, the jade!—wet, but weatherly, an’ such a picture as you never set eyes on, close-hauled within five points of the wind! First they gammoned me as she was a slaver, and then a sugar-merchant’s pleasure-boat, and sometimes they said she was a privateer, with letters of marque from the king; but I didn’t want to know much about that; King George, or King Louis, it made no odds, bless ye; I warn’t a goin’ to turn sawbones, an’ Captain Delaval was *my* master, that was enough for me! Such a master he was, too! No seaman—not he. His hands were as white as a lady’s, an’ I doubt if he knew truck from taffrail; but with old Blowhard, the master, to sail her, and do what the skipper called swabbing and dirty work, there wasn’t a

king's officer as ever I've heard of could touch him. Such a man to fight his ship was Captain Delaval. I've seen him run her in under a Spanish battery, with a table set on deck and a awning spread, and him sitting with a glass of wine in his hand, and give his orders as cool and comfortable as you and me is now. 'Easy, Blowhard,' he'd sing out, when old 'Blow' was sweating, and cursing, and stamping about to get the duty done. 'Don't ye speak so sharp to the men,' says he; 'spoils their ear for music,' says he. 'We'll be out o' this again afore the breeze falls, and we'll turn the fiddles up and have a dance in the cool of the evening.' Then he'd smile at me, and say, 'Slap-Jack, you little blackguard, run below for another pineapple; not so rotten-ripe as the last;' and by the time I was on deck again, he'd be wiping his sword carefully, and drawing on his gloves—that man couldn't so much as whistle a hornpipe without his gloves; and let who would be *second* on board the prize, be she bark, schooner, brig, galleon, or square-rigged ship, Captain Delaval he would be *first*. Look ye here, mates, I made two voyages with Captain Delaval, and when I stepped on the quay at Bristol off the second—there! I was worth a

hundred doubloons, all in gold, besides as much silk as would have lined the foresail, and a pair of diamond ear-rings that I lost the first night I slept ashore. I thought, then, as perhaps I wasn't to see my dandy skipper again, but I was wrong. I've never been in London town but once, an' I don't care if I never goes no more. First man I runs against in Thames Street is Captain Delaval, ridin' in a cart with his hands tied ; and old Blowhard beside him, smelling at a nosegay as big as the binnacle. I don't think as old 'Blow' knowed me again, not in long togs ; but the skipper he smiles, and shows his beautiful white teeth as he was never tired of swabbing and holy-stoning, and 'There's Slap-Jack !' says he ; 'Good-bye, Slap-Jack ; I'll be first man over the gunwale in this here scrimmage, too,' says he, 'for they'll hang me first, and then Blowhard, when he's done with his nosegay.' I wish I could find such another skipper, now ; what say ye, mates ?"

Smoke-Jack, who was sitting next him, did not immediately reply. He was obviously of a logical and argumentative turn of mind, with a cavilling disposition, somewhat inclined to speculative philosophy ; such a character, in short, as naval officers protest against under the title of a lawyer.

He turned the matter over deliberately ere he replied, with a voluminous puff of smoke between each sentence—

“Some likes a barky, and some wouldn’t touch a rope in any craft but a schooner; and there’s others, again, swears a king’s cutter will show her heels to the liveliest of ’em, with a stiffish breeze and a bobble of sea on. I ain’t a goin’ to dispute it. Square-rigged, or fore-and-aft, if so be she’s well-found and answers her helm, I ain’t a-goin’ to say but what she’ll make good weather of it the whole voyage through. Men thinks different, young chap; that’s where it is. Now you asks me *my* opinion, and I’ll give it you, free. I’m a old man-of-war’s man, I am. I’ve eat the king’s biscuit and drank the king’s allowance ever since I were able to eat and drink at all. Now I’ll tell you, young man, a-cause you’ve asked me, free. The king’s sarvice is a good sarvice; I ain’t a-goin’ to say as it isn’t, but for two things: there’s too much of one, and too little of the other. The fust is the work, and the second is the pay. If they’d halve the duty, and double the allowance, and send all the officers before the mast, I ain’t goin’ to dispute but the king’s sarvice would be more to my fancy than I’ve ever found it yet. You see the difference

atwixt one of our lads when he gits ashore, and the Dutch! I won't say as the Dutchman is the better seaman, far from it; though as long as he's got a plank as'll catch a nail, an' a rag as'll hold a breeze, he'll weather it *somehow*; nor I won't say but what Mynheer is as ugly a customer as a king's ship can get alongside of, yard-arm to yard-arm, and let the best man win! But you see him ashore! Spree, young man? Why, a Dutchman *never* has his spree out! You take and hail a man before the mast, able seaman or what not, when he's paid off of a cruise—and mind ye, he doesn't engage for a long spell, doesn't Mynheer—and he'll tow you into dry dock, and set you down to your grub, and blow you out with schnaps as if he was a admiral. Such a berth as he keeps ashore! Pots and pans as bright as the Eddystone; deck scoured and holy-stoned, till you'd like to eat your rations off of it. Why, Black Sam, him as was boatswain's mate on board of the 'Mary Rose,' setting with me in the tap of the Golden Lion, at Amsterdam, he gets uneasy, and he looks here and there an' everywhere, first at the white floor, then at the bright stove, turning his quid about and about, till at last he ups and spits right in the landlord's face. There *was* a

breeze then ! I'm not a-goin' to deny it, but Sam he asks pardon quite gentle and humble-like, for 'what could I do?' says he ; 'it was the only dirty place I could find in the house,' says he. Young chap, I'm not a-goin' to say as you should take and ship yourself on board a Dutchman, 'cause why—maybe if he struck his colours and you was found atween decks, you'd swing at the yard-arm ; but if you be thinking of the king's sarvice and you asks my advice, says I, think about it a little longer, says I. Young chap, I gives you *my* opinion, free. What say you, messmate ? Bear a hand and lower away, for I've been payin' of it out till my mouth's dry."

Bottle-Jack, who did not give his mouth a chance of becoming dry, took a long pull at the beer before he answered ; but as his style was somewhat involved, and obscured besides by the free use of professional metaphors, applied in a sense none but himself could thoroughly appreciate, I will not venture to detail in his own words the copious and illustrative exposition on which he embarked.

It was obvious, however, that Bottle-Jack's inclinations were adverse to the regular service ; and although he would have scouted such a notion,

and probably made himself extremely disagreeable to the man who broached it, there was no question the old sailor had been a pirate, and deserved hanging as richly as any ghastly skeleton now bleaching in its chains and waving to the gusts of a sou'-wester on the exposed sky-line of the Downs. By his own account he had sailed with the notorious Captain Kidd, in the 'Adventure' galley, originally fitted out by merchants and traders of London as a scourge for those sea-robbers who infested the Indian Ocean, and whose enormities made honest men shudder at their bare recital. The 'Adventure,' manned by some of the most audacious spirits to be procured from the banks of the Thames and the Hudson, seemed, like her stout commander, especially qualified for such a purpose. She carried heavy guns, was well found in every respect, and possessed the reputation of a fast sailer and capital sea-boat. Kidd himself was an experienced officer, and had served with distinction. He was intimately acquainted with the eastern seas, and seemed in all respects adapted for an expedition in which coolness, daring, and unswerving honesty of purpose were indispensable qualifications.

Accordingly, Captain Kidd sailed for the Indian

coast, and Bottle-Jack, by his own account, was boatswain's mate on board the 'Adventure.'

There is an old proverb recommending the selection of a "thief to catch a thief," which in this instance received a new and singular interpretation. Kidd was probably a thief, or at least a pirate, at heart. No sooner had he reached his destination off the coast of Malabar, than he threw off his sheep's clothing, and appeared at once the master-wolf in the predatory pack he was sent to destroy. Probably the temptation proved too much for him. With his seamanship, his weight of metal, and his crew, he could outsail, out-manceuvre, and out-fight, friends and foes alike. It soon occurred to him that the former were easy and lucrative prizes, the latter, bad to capture, and often not worth the trouble when subdued. It was quicker work to gain possession at first hand of silk and spices, cinnamon and sandal-wood, gold, silver, rum, coffee, and tobacco, than to wait till the plunder had been actually seized by another, and then, after fighting hard to retake it, obtain but a jackal's share from the Home Government. In a short space of time there was but one pirate dreaded from the Cape of Good Hope to the Straits of Malacca, and his name was Kidd.

From Surat down to the mouth of the Tap-tee, Captain Kidd ruled like a petty sovereign ; Bottle-Jack, if he was to be believed, like a grand vizier. Not only did they take tax and toll from every craft that swam, but they robbed, murdered, and lorded it as unmercifully on dry land. Native merchants, even men of rank and position, were put to torture, for purposes of extortion, by day ; peasants burned alive in their huts to illuminate a seaman's frolic by night. Her crew behaved like devils broke loose ashore, and the 'Adventure,' notwithstanding a certain discipline exacted by her commander, was, doubtless, a hell afloat. Money, however, came in rapidly. Kidd, with all his crimes, possessed the elements of success in method, organization, and power of command. His sailors forgot the horrors they had inflicted and their own degradation, when they counted the pile of doubloons that constituted their share of plunder. Amongst the swarm of rovers who then swept the seas, Captain Kidd was considered the most successful, and even in a certain sense, notwithstanding his enormities, the most *respectable* of all.

Bottle-Jack did not appear to think the relation of his adventures in any way derogatory to his own

credit. He concluded with the following peroration, establishing his position in the confident tone of a man who is himself convinced of its justice :—

“Wot I says, is this here—The sea was made for them as sails upon it, and you ain’t a goin’ to tell me as it can be portioned out into gardens an’ orchards, and tobacco plantations like the dirt we calls land. Werry well, if the sea be free, them as sails upon it can make free with wot it offers them. If in case now, as I’m look-out-man, we’ll say, in the maintop, and I makes a galleon of her, for instance, deep in the water under easy sail, you’re not to tell me as because she shows Spanish colours I’m not to take what I want out of her. Stow that, mates, for it’s clean nonsense ! The way old Kidd acted was this here—First, he got her weather-gage ; then he brought her to with a gun, civil and reasonable ; arter that, whether she showed fight, or whether she showed friendly, he boarded her, and when he’d taken all he wanted, captain, crew, and passengers just walked the plank, easy and quiet, and no words about it.”

“And the craft?” asked Slap-Jack, breathless with interest in the old pirate’s reminiscences.

“Scuttled her !” answered the other conclusively. “Talking’s dry work. Let’s have some more beer.”



CHAPTER III.

THE PARLOUR-LODGER.

THERE was a tolerably snug parlour under the roof of the Fox and Fiddle, notwithstanding that its dimensions were small; its floor uneven, and its ceiling so low that a solitary inmate could not but feel enlivened by the company of the landlord's family, who inhabited the rooms overhead. This apartment, which was usually occupied by some skipper from beyond seas, put forward certain claims to magnificence as well as comfort; and although the vaguest attempts at cleanliness seemed to have been suppressed, there was no little pretension apparent in the furniture, the chimney ornaments, and the "History of the Prodigal Son" on the walls. China shepherdesses

stood on the mantelpiece, surmounted by the backbone of a shark. Two gilt chairs, with frayed velvet cushions, supported an unframed representation of a three-decker, with every available sail set, and British colours flying at the main, stemming a grass-green sea, under a sky of intense blue. A contracted square of real Turkey carpet covered a few feet in the middle, and the rest of the floor, ornamented at regular intervals by spittoons, stood inch-deep in dust. The hearth could not have been swept for days, nor the smouldering fire raked out for hours; but on a mahogany sideboard, that had obviously sustained at least one sea-voyage, stood a dozen different drinking-measures, surrounding a punch-bowl capacious enough to have baptized a full-grown pirate.

The occupant of this chamber was sitting at the table engrossed by a task that seemed to tax all his energies and employ his whole attention. He was apparently no adept at accounts, and every time he added a column afresh, and found its result differed from his previous calculation, he swore a French oath in a whisper and began again. It was nearly dusk before the landlord came in with candles, when his guest looked up, as if much relieved at a temporary interruption of work.

Butter-faced Bob was a plausible fellow enough, well fitted for the situation he filled, crimp, publican, free-trader, and, on occasion, receiver of stolen goods. From the seaman in the tap, to the skipper in the parlour, he prided himself on his facility in making conversation to his customers, saying the right thing to each ; or, as he expressed it, “oiling the gear so as the crank should work easy.”

Setting down the candles, therefore, he proceeded to lubrication without delay.

“Sorry shall we be to lose ye, Captain ! and indeed it will drive me out of the public line at last, to see the way as the best o’ friends must part. My dame, she says to me, it was but this blessed day as I set down to my nooning, says she, Bob, says she, whatever we shall do when the Captain’s gone foreign, says she, I, for one, can’t tell no more than the dead. You step round to the quay, says she, when you’ve a-taken a drink, and see if ‘The Bashful Maid’ han’t histed her blue-Peter at the fore, and the Captain he’ll make a fair wind o’ this here sou’-wester, see if he won’t, and may-be weigh at the ebb ; an’ it ’ll break my heart, let alone the chil’en’s, to wish him a good voyage, it will. She’s about ready for sea, Cap-

tain, *now*; I see them gettin' the fresh water aboard myself."

The Captain, as his host called him, smiled good-humouredly.

"Your dame will have many a better lodger than I have been, Bob," said he, fixing his bold eyes on the landlord, which the latter, who never seemed comfortable under an honest man's gaze, avoided by peering into every corner of the room; "one that will stay longer with you, and entertain more friends than I have done. What of that? The heaviest purse makes the best lodger, and the highest score the merriest landlord, at every hostelry in Europe. Well, I shall be ready for sea now, when I've got my complement; but I'm not going to cruise in the"—here the speaker stopped short and corrected himself—"not going to cruise *anywhere*, short-handed."

Bob's eyes glistened, and he stole a look in the Captain's face.

"How many would you be wanting?" said he, cautiously, "and where would they have to serve? First-class men is very bad to get here-away, just now."

"If I had a gunner, a boatswain's-mate, and a

good captain of the foretop, I'd weigh next tide, and chance it," replied the other, cheerfully; but his chin fell while his eye rested on the pile of accounts, and he wondered how he could ever comb them into shape for inspection.

Bob thought of the seamen still drinking in his taproom, and the obviously low state of their finances. It would work, he decided, but it must be done under three influences, viz., beer, secrecy, and caution.

"Captain," said he, shutting the door carefully, "I'd rather do you a turn than any lodger I've had yet. If I can help you to a hand or two, I'm the man as'll do it. You'll be willing to pay the expenses, I suppose?"

The Captain did not appear totally inexperienced in such matters, for, on asking the amount and receiving for answer a sum that would have purchased all the stock of liquors in the house over and over again, he showed neither indignation nor surprise, but observed quietly—

"Able seamen, of course?"

"Of course!" repeated Bob. "Honour, you know, Captain, honour!" If he had added "among thieves," he would none the less clearly have expressed the situation. Reflecting for a moment,

he approached his guest and whispered in his ear, "For the account?"

"Ask me no questions," answered the Captain significantly. "You know as well as I do that your price covers everything. Is it a bargain?"

"That would make a difference, you see, Captain," urged Bob, determined to get all he could. "It's not what it used to be, and the Government is uncommon hard upon a look-out-man now, if he makes a mistake in the colours of a prize. In King James' time, I've seen the gentlemen-rovers drinking at this very table with the mayor and the magistrates, ay, and sending up their compliments and what not, may-be, to the Lord-Lieutenant himself. Why, that very mug as you see there was given me by poor Captain Delaval; quite the gentleman he was! An' he made no secret where he took it from, nor how they cut the Portuguese chap's throat as was drinking from it in the after-cabin. And now, it's as likely as not the Whigs would hang a man in chains for such a thing. I tell you, Captain, the hands don't fancy it. They can't cruise a mile along-shore without running foul of a gibbet with a pi—I mean, with a skeleton on it, rattling and

grinning as if he was alive. It makes a difference, Captain—it makes a difference!”

“Take it or leave it,” replied the other, looking like a man who had made his highest bid, which no consideration would induce him to increase by a shilling.

Bob evidently thought so. “A bargain be it,” said he, with a villainous smile on his shining face; and muttering something about his wish to oblige a customer and the high respect he entertained for his guest’s character, in all its relations, public, private, and nautical, he shambled out of the room, leaving the latter to tackle once more with his accounts.

A shade of melancholy crossed the Captain’s brow, deeper and darker than was to be attributed to the unwelcome nature of his employment or the sombre surroundings of his position. The light of two tallow-candles, by which he worked, was not indeed enlivening, bringing into indistinct relief the unsightly furniture and the gloomy pictures on the walls. The yard-dog, too, behind the house, had not entirely discontinued his lamentations, and the dip and wash of a retiring tide upon the shingle no farther off than the end of the street was like the voice from some unearthly

mourner in its solemn and continuous wail. It told of lonely nights far out on the wild dark sea ; of long shifting miles of surf thundering in pitiless succession on the ocean shore ; of mighty cliffs and slabs of dripping rock, flinging back their defiance to the gale in the spray of countless hungry, leaping waves, that toss and madden round their prey ere she breaks up and goes to pieces in the storm. More than all, it told of desolation, and doubt, and danger, and death, and the uncertainty beyond.

But to him, sitting there between the candles, his head bent over his work, it seemed like the voice of a counsellor and a friend. Each wave that, fuller than ordinary, circled up with a fiercer lash, to ebb with a louder, angrier, and more protracted hiss, seemed to brighten the man's face, and he listened like a prisoner who knows the step that leads him out to life, and liberty, and love. At such times he would glance round the room, congratulating himself that his charts, his instruments, his telescope, were all safe on board, and, perhaps, would rise, take a turn or two, and open the window-shutter for a consoling look at a certain bright speck in the surrounding darkness, which might be either in earth, or sea, or air, and was

indeed the anchor-light in the foretop of his ship. Then he would return, refreshed and comforted, to his accounts.

He was beginning to hope he had really got the better of these, and had so far succeeded that two consecutive columns permitted themselves to be added up with an appearance of probability, when an unusually long-drawn howl from the house-dog, following the squeak of a fiddle, distracted him from his occupation, and provoked him to swear once more in a foreign tongue.

It was difficult to make calculations, involving a thousand probabilities, with that miserable dog howling at regular intervals. It was impossible to speculate calmly on the value of his cargo, the quantity of his powder, and the chances of peace and war. While he sat there, he knew well enough that his letters of marque would bear him out in pouncing on any unfortunate merchantman he could come across under Spanish colours, but there had been whispers of peace in London, and the weekly news-letter (substitute for our daily paper), read aloud that afternoon in the coffee-house round the corner, indorsed the probability of these rumours. By the time he reached his cruising-ground, the treaty might have

been signed which would change a privateer into a pirate, and the exploit that would earn a man his knighthood this week might swing him at his own yard-arm the next. In those times, however, considerable latitude, if not allowed, was at least claimed by these kindred professions, and the calculator in the parlour of the Fox and Fiddle seemed unlikely to be over-scrupulous in the means by which he hoped to attain his end.

He had resolved on earning, or winning, or taking, such a sum of money as would render him independent of fortune for life. He had an object in this which he deemed worthy of any sacrifice he could offer. Therefore, he had fitted out and freighted his brigantine partly at his own expense, partly at that of certain confiding merchants in Leadenhall Street, so as to combine the certain gains of a peaceful trader with the more hazardous venture of a licensed sea-robber who takes by the strong hand. If the license should expire before his rapacity was satisfied, he would affect ignorance while he could, and when that was no longer practicable, throw off all disguise and hoist the black flag openly at the main.

To this end he had armed his brigantine with the heaviest guns she could carry, had taken in

store of provisions, water, spare tackle, gun-powder, pistols, cutlasses, and musquetoons; had manned her with the best seamen and wildest spirits he could lay hands on. These items had run up a considerable bill. He was now preparing a detailed statement of the cost, for the information of his friends in Leadenhall Street.

And all this time, had he only known it, fortune was preparing for him, without effort on his part, the independence he would risk life and character to gain. That very sou'-wester wailing up the narrow street was rattling the windows of a castle on a hill hundreds of miles away, and disturbing the last moments of a dying man in his lordly bedchamber; was driving before it, over a bleak, barren moor, pelting storms of rain to drench the cloaked and booted heir, riding post to reach that death-bed; sowing in a weak constitution the seeds of an illness that would allow him but a brief enjoyment of his inheritance; and the next in succession, the far-off cousin, was making up his accounts in the humble parlour of a seaport pot-house, because he was to sail for the Spanish main with the next tide.

“One, two, tree!”—thump—“one, two, tree!”—thump—“*Balancez! Chassez. Un, deux, trois!*”

Thump after thump, louder and heavier than before. The rafters shook, the ceiling quivered. The Captain rose, irritated and indignant, to call fiercely for the landlord.

Butter-faced Bob, anticipating a storm, wisely turned a deaf ear, ensconcing himself in the back kitchen, whence he refused to emerge.

The Captain shouted again, and receiving no answer, walked into the passage.

“Stow that noise!” he halloed from the foot of the half-dozen wooden steps that led to the upper floor. “Who is to get any business done with a row like that going on aloft, as if the devil was dead and the ship gone overboard?” The Captain’s voice was powerful and his language plain, but the only reply he received was a squeak from the fiddle, a wail from the dog, and a “One, two, tree”—thump—louder than ever.

His patience began to fail.

“Zounds! man,” he broke out; “will you leave off that cursed noise, or must I come up and *make* you?”

Then the fiddle stopped, the dog was silent, and children’s voices were heard laughing heartily.

The last sound would have appeased the Captain had his wrath been ever so high, but a strange,

puzzled expression overspread his features while he received the following answer in an accent that denoted the speaker was no Englishman.

“You are a rude, gross man. I sall continue my instructions to my respectable young friends in the dance wizout your permission. Monsieur, you are insolent. *Tiens !*”

The last word carried with it such an amount of anger, defiance, and contempt, as can only be conveyed in that monosyllable by a Frenchman. The Captain’s frown changed to a broad smile, but he affected wrath none the less, while he exclaimed in a coarse, sailor-like voice—

“Insolent! you dancing dog of a Mounseer! Insolent! I’ll teach *you* manners afore I’ve done with you. If you don’t drop it *now*, this instant, I’ll come aloft in a pig’s whisper, and pull you down by the ears!”

“Ears! *Les oreilles!*” repeated the voice above stairs, in a tone of repressed passion, that seemed to afford his antagonist intense amusement. “*Soyez tranquîl, mes enfants.* My children, do not derange yourselves. Sir, you have insulted me; you have insulted my society. You shall answer me. *Monsieur! vous allez me rendre raison!*”

Thus speaking, the dancing-master, for such was

the foreign gentleman whose professional avocations the parlour-lodger had interrupted, made his appearance at the head of the stairs, with a small fiddle under his arm and a sheathed rapier in his hand ; the passage below was quite dark, but the light from an open door behind him brought his figure into relief, whilst the skipper, on the contrary, remained unseen in the gloom. Notwithstanding that the one was in a towering passion, the other shook with suppressed laughter.

“Come on,” he shouted roughly, though he could scarce command his voice, adding in a more natural tone, and with a perfect French accent—
“*On prétend, dans les Mousquetaires du Roi, que Monsieur est de la première force pour l'épée !*”

The effect was instantaneous. With one spring the dancing-master was upon him, kissing both his cheeks, hugging him in his arms, and repeating, with eyes full of tears—

“Captain George ! Captain George ! My comrade, my captain, my officer ; and I thought I was without a friend in this miserable country ; without a friend and without a sou ! Now I have found the one, I don't care about the other. Oh, what happiness ! What fortune ! What luck !”

The former Captain of Musketeers seemed

equally pleased, if in a less demonstrative manner, at this unexpected meeting, though he had been better prepared for so strange a termination of their dispute by his recognition of the other's voice before he caught sight of his figure. Now he pulled him into the parlour, sent for Butter-faced Bob to fill the capacious punch-bowl, pressed him into a chair with both hands on his shoulders, and looked gravely into his face, saying—

“Eugène, I owe you my life, and I am a man who never left a debt unpaid.”



CHAPTER IV.

A VOLUNTEER.

BEAUDÉSIR, by the wretched light of two tallow-candles, looked paler, thinner, more dejected, than even that pale, thin, anxious recruit who had joined the Grey Musketeers with so formidable a character as a master of defence some months before. No wonder. He was an enthusiast at heart, and an enthusiast can seldom withstand the pressure of continuous adversity. A temporary gleam of sunshine, indeed, warms him up to the highest pitch of energy, daring, and intellectual resource; nay, he will battle nobly against the fiercest storm so long as the winds blow, the thunder peals overhead, and less exalted spirits fly cowering to the nearest shelter; but it is in a bitter, bleak, protracted

frost that he droops and fades away. Give him excitement, even the excitement of pain, and he becomes a hero. Put him to mere drudgery, though it be the honest drudgery of duty, and he almost ceases to be a man.

There is, nevertheless, something essentially elastic in the French character, which even in such a disposition as Beaudésir's preserved him from giving way to utter despair. Though he might well be excused for repining, when thus compelled to gain his bread by teaching the landlord's children to dance at a low pot-house, yet this young man's natural temperament enabled him to take interest even in so unworthy an occupation, and he was jealous enough of their progress to resent that rude interruption he experienced from the parlour with a flash of the old spirit cherished in the King's Musketeers.

Still he looked pale and wan, nor was it till George had forced on him a beaker of steaming punch that his eye recovered its brightness and the blood mantled once more in his clear sallow cheek.

"And you escaped them?" said the Captain, reverting to the fatal night of their affray in the Montmirail gardens. "Escaped them without a

scratch! Well, it was ten to one against you, and I cursed the Duke with all my heart as I galloped on towards the coast when I thought of your predicament. Guard-room, court-martial, confession, and a firing party was the best I could wish you; for on the reverse of the card I pictured a *lettre de cachet*, and imprisonment for life in Vincennes or the Bastile! But how did you get away? and above all, how did you elude the search afterwards?"

Eugène wet his lips with the hot punch, which he seemed to relish less than his more robust comrade, and looked distrustfully about him while he replied—

"I had little difficulty in extricating myself from the gardens, my Captain, for when I had disposed of Bras-de-Fer, there was no *real* swordsman left. The Musketeers fight well, no doubt; but they are yet far from true perfection in the art, and their practice is more like our fishermen's cudgel-play than scientific fencing. I wounded two of them slightly, made a spring at the wall, and was in the street at the moment you entered the Prince-Marshal's carriage. My difficulty then was, where to conceal myself. I do not know Paris thoroughly, to begin with, and

I confess I shuddered at the idea of skulking for weeks in some squalid haunt of vice and misery. I think I had rather have been taken and shot down at once."

"You would not have been safe even in dens like those," interrupted the other. "Our Débonnaire is not so refined in his orgies but that I believe every garret in the Faubourgs is frequented by himself and his *roués*. Bah! when we drew pay from Louis le Grand at least we served a *gentleman*. The Jesuits would have been your best chance. Why did you not take refuge with *them*?"

Eugène shuddered, and the pale face turned paler still, but he did not answer the question.

"When we used to hunt the hare in Normandy," he resumed, "I have observed that, if hard pressed, she would return to her form, and often thus made her escape, whereas the wolf and the stag, flying straight away, were generally run down. Like the hare, then, I doubled back and lay hid in the very house where I habitually lodged. It was the first place they searched, but they never came near it again; and the second day an old comrade found me out, took me to his own home, and furnished me with a disguise."

"An old comrade!" repeated the Captain.

"Bravo! Ah! we had always plenty of *esprit de corps* in the Musketeers. It was Adolphe, I'll wager a crown, or the young Count de Guiches, or Bellegarde!"

"None of these, my Captain," explained Eugène. "It was no Musketeer; Black, Red, or Grey. When I said comrade, I meant an old college friend. It was an Abbé. I know not why I should keep it secret. Abbé Malletort."

The Captain pondered. "Abbé Malletort!" said he. "That is more than strange. The Regent's confidant; his chief adviser, men said; his principal favourite! He must have had some reason—some deep-laid scheme of double treachery. I know the man. A smooth-spoken churchman; a pleasant fellow to drink with, and a good judge of drill. But if it was his interest to betray the poor thing, I wouldn't trust him with the life of a dog!"

"You little know him," urged the other eagerly. "Generous, kind, and secret—had it not been for his advice and his exertions I should never have got away alive. He kept me a fortnight in his apartment, till the heat of the pursuit was over and Paris had ceased to talk of our affray, which everybody believed an organized conspiracy of

the Huguenots—of the Jansenists—of the young King's party—of the British Government. What shall I say?—of the Great Mogul. I did not dare show myself, of course. I could only hear the news from my friend, and I saw him but seldom. I was forced to leave Paris at last without knowing how far the disturbance affected the ladies in whose grounds it took place. I tried hard to find out, but it was impossible."

The Captain glanced sharply in his face, and took a strong gulp at the punch. Eugène continued:—

"I got through the barrier with an Italian company of jugglers, disguised as a Pantaleone. It was not too amusing to be obliged to perform antics for the amusement of the Guard; fortunately they were of the Prince de Condé's regiment, which had just marched into Paris. But the mountebanks were good people, kindly, and perfectly trustworthy. They were polite enough to say that I might make an excellent livelihood if I would but take in earnest to the business. I left them at Rouen, and from that place reached the seaboard on foot. My object was to take refuge in England. Here alone I felt I should be safe for a time, and when the storm should blow over I hoped to

return again. I little knew what a climate it is! what a country! what people! They are somewhat better when you are used to them, and I own I accustom myself more easily than I could have believed to their beef, their beer, their barbarous language, and their utter want of politeness. But they have been kind to me, these rough islanders. It was an English fishing-boat that landed me from Havre, and the fisherman made me stay a week in his house for nothing because he discovered accidentally that I had exhausted my purse to pay for my passage. Since then, my Captain, I have supported myself by teaching these awkward English to dance. It is a noble exercise after all, were they not so stiff, so ungraceful! And yet my pupils make progress! These children above stairs have already begun the minuet. Egotist that I am! Tell me, my Captain, how you too come to find yourself in' this miserable town, without gardens, without barriers, without barracks, without Hôtel de Ville, without a church, even without an opera!"

The Captain smiled. "You have a good right to ask," said he, "since, but for you, I should not have been here at this moment. When I drew on the Regent that night, as I would have drawn

on the young King himself, had I seen him guilty of such an outrage, I was, as you know, surrounded and attacked by an escort of my own men. I tell you, Beaudésir, I never expected to leave the gardens alive, and I do not believe there is another fencer in France who could have helped me out of so awkward a scrape. I was sorry to see our old Bras-de-Fer go down, I admit ; but what would you have ? When it's give and take, thrust and parry, ten against two, one cannot stand on these little delicacies of feeling. As I vanished through the garden-gate I looked for you everywhere, but there was no time to lose, and I thought we could escape more easily separate than in company. I knew you were neither down nor taken, because there was no shout of triumph from the men to announce the fact. The Prince de Chateau-Guerrand, my old general, was standing at the door of his coach when I gained the street. How he came there I am at a loss to guess, for you may believe I asked no questions ; but that you and he should have dropped from the clouds at the Hôtel Montmirail, in the moment of my need, is one of those happy strokes of accident by which battles are won, and which we call fortune of war. I thought him a

martinet when I was on his staff, with his everlasting parades, and reports, and correspondence, to say nothing of his interminable stories about Turenne, but I always knew his heart was in the right place. ‘Jump in!’ said he, catching me by the arm. ‘Drive those English horses to death, and take the coach where you will!’ In five minutes we were out of Paris, and half a league off on our way to the coast.

“I hope the English horses may have survived the journey; but they brought me to my first relay as fast as ever I went in the saddle, and I knew that with half an hour’s start of everything I was safe. Who was to question a Captain of King’s Musketiers riding post for England on the Regent’s business? The relays were even so good that I had time to stop and breakfast comfortably, at leisure, and to feed my horse, half way through the longest stage.

“I had little delay when I reached the Channel. The wind was easterly, and before my horse had done shaking himself on the quay, an honest fellow had put his two sons, a spare oar, and a keg of brandy, on board a shallop about as weatherly as an egg-shell, hoisted a sail the size of a pocket-handkerchief, and stood out manfully with a follow-

ing wind and an ebb tide. I know the Channel well, and I was as sure as he must have been that the wind would change when the tide turned, and we should be beating about, perhaps in a stiffish breeze, all night. It was not for me to baulk him, however, and I only stipulated for a loaf or two of bread and a beaker of water in the bows. I tell you before they led my horse to the stable, we were a cable's length off shore.

“A fair wind, Eugène, does not always make a short voyage. At sundown it fell to a dead calm. The lads and the old man, and I, who speak to you, took our turns, and pulled like galley-slaves at the oars. With the moon-rise, a light breeze came up from the south-west, and it freshened by degrees till at midnight it was blowing half a gale. The egg-shell behaved nobly, and swam like a duck, but it took all the old man's time to steer her, and the sons said as many ‘Aves’ before dawn as would have lasted a whole convent for a month.

“At one time I feared we must put her head about, and run for it, on the chance of making Ambleteuse, or even Calais, but the old fellow who owned her had a conscience, and to give him his due he was a first-rate sailor. The wind moderated

at sunrise, drawing round by the south, and at noon we had made Beachy Head, when it fell a dead calm, with a ground swell that was no child's play when we laid out on our oars. By dint of hard pulling we ran her ashore on the English coast about sundown, and my friend put off again with his two sons, none the worse for the voyage, and all the better for some twenty gold pieces with which I paid my passage. He deserved it, for he earned it fairly. She was but an egg-shell, as I said before, but she swam like a duck; it's only fair to allow that."

"And now, my Captain," asked Beaudésir, looking round the strangely-furnished apartment; "you are living here? you are settled? you are a householder? Are you reconciled to spend your life in this dirty little town, ill-paved, ill-lighted, smelling of salt water and tar, where it always rains, and they bring you nothing to drink but black beer and hot punch?"

Captain George laughed heartily. "Not such a bad thing that hot punch," said he, "when you can get neither Chambertin, Burgundy, nor Bourdeaux. But I understand you nevertheless, comrade. It is not likely that a man who has served Louis le Grand in the Musketeers would be

content to vegetate here like a wisp of sea-weed left at high-water mark. It was lucky I met you to-night. In twenty-four hours, at most, I hope to be off the Needles if the wind holds."

Beaudésir looked interrogatively at the pile of accounts on the table.

"You have turned trader, my Captain?" said he. "You will make a fortune in two voyages. At College they pretended I had some skill in reading characters. You have luck written on your forehead. I wish I was going with you, were it only as a clerk."

Captain George pondered for a while before he answered, nay, he filled and emptied his glass, took two or three turns in the narrow apartment, which admitted indeed but of what sailors call "a fisherman's walk—two steps and overboard," and finally, pulling back the shutter, pointed to the light in the foretop of his brigantine.

"You won't catch me afloat again," said he, "in a craft like a walnut-shell, with a scrap of paper for a sail. No, no. There she rides, my lad, the lady that would take me round the world, and never wet a stitch on my back from head to heel. Why, close-hauled, in a stiff breeze, there's not a King's cutter in the Channel can hold her own

with her; and off a wind, she'd have the whole fleet hull-down in six hours, making such good weather of it, too, all the while! I wish you could see her by daylight, with her straight run, and her raking masts, and bran new spars, and a fresh lick of paint I gave her in dock before we came round. She looks as trim as a pincushion, and as saucy as a dancing-girl. She carries a few popguns too, in case of accidents; and when she shows her teeth, she means to bite, you may take your oath! I'll tell you what, Eugène, you must come on board to-morrow before I weigh. I should like to show you over 'The Bashful Maid' myself, and I hope to get my anchor up and shake out my fore-topsail with the afternoon tide."

Landsman, Frenchman, though he was, Beau-désir's eyes kindled, and he caught his friend's enthusiasm like wild-fire.

"I would give my right arm to be going with you," said he. "Excitement, adventure, storms, seamanship, and all the wonders of the tropics! While for me, muddy beer, gloomy fogs, dirty streets, and clumsy English children, learning to dance! Well! every man to his trade. Here's a good voyage to you, and my best wishes!"

Again he wet his lips with the punch, now grown cold and sticky in his glass. Captain George was so preoccupied, he forgot to acknowledge the courtesy.

"Can you keep accounts?" he asked abruptly, pointing to the papers on the table.

"Any schoolboy might keep such as these," answered Eugène, running his eye over one of the columns, and adding, as he examined it. "Nevertheless, my Captain, here is an error that will falsify the whole sum."

He pointed to a mistake in the numerals that had repeatedly escaped the other's observation, and from which much of his labour had arisen. In a few minutes, he had gone through, and corrected as many pages of calculation. The figures came right now, as if by magic. Captain George had found what he wanted.

"Where did you learn all this?" he inquired in astonishment.

"At Avranches, in Normandy," was the answer.

"Where they taught you to fence?"

"Precisely; and to shoot with musketoon or pistol. I can pick the ace of diamonds off a card at fifteen paces with either weapon."

He spoke modestly, as he always did of his

proficiency in such feats of skill. They came so easily to him.

“Will you sail with me?” asked George frankly. “You can help me with my papers, and earn your share of the plun——I should say of the profits. No, my friend! you shall not leap blindfold. Listen. I have letters of marque in my cabin, and I mean them to hold good whether peace be proclaimed or not. It may be, we shall fight with a rope round our necks. The gains are heavy, but the risk is great.”

“I never count risk!” was the reply.

“Then finish the punch!” said Captain George; and thus the bargain was ratified, which added yet one more to the *rôle* of characters Beaudésir was destined to enact on the stage of life.



CHAPTER V.

THREE PRESSED MEN.

WHILE the occupants of the parlour were sipping punch, those of the taproom had gone systematically through the different stages of inebriety—the friendly, the argumentative, the captious, the communicative, the sentimental, the quarrelsome, the maudlin-affectionate, and the extremely drunk. By nightfall, neither Smoke-Jack, Bottle-Jack, nor Slap-Jack could handle a clay pipe without breaking it, nor fix their eyes steadily on the candle for five consecutive moments. Notwithstanding, however, the many conflicting opinions that had been broached during their sitting, there were certain points on which they agreed enthusiastically—that they were the three finest fellows

under the sun, that there was no calling, like seamanship, no element like salt-water, and no craft in which any one of them had yet sailed so lively in a sea-way as this, which seemed now to roll and pitch and stagger beneath their besotted senses. With a confirmed impression, varied only by each man's own experience, that they were weathering a gale under considerable difficulties, in a low latitude, and that it was their watch on deck, though they kept it somewhat unaccountably below, all three had gone through the abortive ceremony they called "pricking for the softest plank," had pulled their rough sea-coats over their heads, and lain down on the floor among the spittoons, to sleep out the dreamless sleep of intoxication.

Long before midnight, Butter-faced Bob, looking in, well-satisfied, beheld his customers of the afternoon now transformed into actual goods and chattels, bales of bone and sinew and courage, that he could sell, literally by weight, at an enormous price, and for ready money. While he turned the light of his candle from one sleeper to another, he was running over a mental sum comprising all the elementary rules of arithmetic. He added the several prices of the recumbent articles

in guineas. He subtracted the few shillings'-worth of liquor they had consumed. He multiplied by five the hush-money he expected, over and above, from the purchaser, and finally, he divided the total, in anticipation, between himself, his wife, the tax-gatherer, and the most pressing of his creditors.

When he had finished these calculations, he returned to the parlour, where Captain George sat brooding over the remains of his punch, the late enlisted recruit having retired to pack up his fiddle and the very small stock of clothes he possessed.

Their bargain was soon concluded, although there was some little difficulty about delivering the goods. Notwithstanding, perhaps in consequence of the many cases of oppression that had stained the last half of the preceding century, a strong reaction had set in against anything in the shape of "kidnapping;" and a press-gang, even for a king's ship, was not likely to meet with toleration in the streets of a seaport town. Moreover, suspicions had already been aroused as to the character of 'The Bashful Maid.' A stricter discipline seemed to be observed on board that wicked-looking craft than was customary even in the regular service,

and this unusual rigour was accounted for by the lawless conduct of her "liberty-men" when they *did* come ashore. Nobody knew better than her Captain that, under the present aspect of political affairs in London, it would be wise to avoid notice by the authorities. The only thing he dreaded on earth or sea was a vision, by which he was haunted daily, till he could get all his stores shipped. It represented a sloop-of-war detached from the neighbouring squadron in the Downs, coming round the Point, dropping her anchor in the harbour, and sending a lieutenant and boat's crew on board to overhaul his papers, and, may be, summarily prevent his beautiful craft from standing out to sea.

Neither was Butter-faced Bob rash or indiscreet where his own interests were affected. Using a metaphor he had picked up from his customers, it was his boast that he could "keep a bright look-out, and steer small" with the best of them; and he now impressed on Captain George, with great earnestness, the necessity of secrecy and caution in getting the three fresh hands down to the quay and tumbling them up the side of the brigantine.

Had the Captain known their inclinations, he might have made his own bargain, and saved three-

fourths of the expense, but his landlord took care that in such cases the principals should never come together, telling the officers they could make what terms they chose when the men found themselves fairly trapped and powerless in blue water, while he kept the latter in a state of continuous inebriety, so long as they dwelt in his house, which rendered them utterly reckless of everything but liquor and tobacco.

His shining face wore the well-satisfied expression of a man who has performed a good action, while he motioned with his thumb to the adjoining taproom.

“I’ve a cart ready in the back yard,” said he, “and a few empty casks to tumble in along with our chaps. It will only look like the fresh water going aboard, so as you may weigh with the morning tide. Will they send a boat off if you show a light?”

Captain George nodded. The boatswain whom he had left in charge, and on whom he could rely, had directions for a certain code of signals, amongst which, the waving of a lantern thrice from the end of the quay was to be answered by a boat ashore.

“We’d best get them in at once, then,” said

Bob, only anxious now to be rid of his guests. "I'll go and put the horse to, and perhaps you and me and the French gentleman, as he seems a friend of yours, can manage it between us."

Accordingly, Bob betook himself to the back yard and the stable, while Beaudésir was summoned to assist the process of embarkation. In ten minutes all was prepared, and it was only necessary to lift the three drunken tars into the carriage provided for them.

With the two elder and heavier men there was no difficulty. They grunted, indeed, impatiently, though without opening their eyes, and seemed to sleep as soundly, while being dragged along a dusty passage and hoisted into a narrow cart amongst empty water-casks, as if they took their rest habitually under such disadvantages; but Slap-Jack's younger constitution had not been so completely overcome, and it was necessary to soothe him by a fiction which has possessed in all times an indescribable charm for the seafaring imagination.

Bob whispered impressively in his ear that he had been sent for, thus in the dead of night, by the Admiral's daughter, who had conceived for him a fatal and consuming passion, having seen

him in his "long togs" in the street. Muttering inarticulately about "Alice," Slap-Jack at once abandoned himself to the illusion, and dropped off to sleep again, with delightful anticipations of the romantic fate in store for him.

As the wheels rumbled over the rough streets, through the rainy gusts and the dark night, followed by Captain George and Beaudésir, the latter could not but compare the vehicle to a dead-cart, carrying away its burden through some city stricken with the plague. This pleasing fancy he communicated to his comrade, who made the following inconsequent reply—

"I only hope the harbour-watch may be as drunk as they are. It's our best chance to get them on board without a row. There's her light, Eugène. If the sky would lift a little, you might make out her spars, the beauty! but I'm almost afraid now you'll have to wait for dawn."

The harbour-watch was drunk, or at least fast asleep in the sentry-box on wheels that afforded him shelter, and the sky did *not* lift in the least degree; so very soon after the waving of the lantern a boat from 'The Bashful Maid' touched the stone steps of the quay, having been cunningly impelled thither by a screw-driving process, worked

with one oar at the stern, and which made far less noise than the more powerful practice of pulling her with even strokes.

Two swarthy, ill-looking fellows sat in the boat, and a scowl passed over their features when they saw their Captain's attitude of precaution with one hand on the pistol he wore at his belt. Perhaps they were disappointed not to be able to elude his vigilance and have one more run on shore before they sailed. It was no use trying to "gammon the skipper," though. They had discovered that already, and they lent their aid with a will, when they found it must be so, to place their future comrades in the same predicament as themselves.

The whole affair was managed so quietly that, even had the harbour-guard, a brandy-faced veteran of sixty, remained wide-awake and perfectly sober, he might have been excused for its escaping his vigilance. Bob himself, standing with his empty cart on the quay, could hardly hear the dip of the oars as his late guests were pulled cautiously away. He did not indeed remain there very long to listen. He had done with them one and all—for was not the score paid? and it behoved him to return home and prepare for fresh arrivals. He turned therefore with a well-satisfied glance towards the light

in the foretop of the brigantine, and wished 'The Bashful Maid' a good voyage, while at the same moment Beaudésir stumbled awkwardly up her side. To the latter this was, indeed, a new and startling phase of life, but it was full of excitement, and consequently very much to his taste. Captain George, taking him below, and pointing out a couch in his cabin on which to pass the rest of the night, thought he had seen a good deal of worse material for a privateer's-man, or even a pirate, than this pale gentle young adventurer, late of the Grey Musketeers.

Covered by a boat-cloak, and accommodated with two or three cushions, Eugène's bed was quite as comfortable as that which he occupied at the Fox and Fiddle. It was long past sunrise when he awoke, and realizing his position he ran on deck with a landsman's usual conviction that he was already miles out at sea. It was startling, and a little disappointing, to observe the quay, the straggling buildings of the town, the light-house, and other well-known objects within musket-shot, and to find that the brigantine, in spite of her lively motions, still rode at anchor, not half a cable's length from a huge, smooth, red buoy, which was dancing and dipping in the morning sun as if it was alive.

There was a fresh breeze off shore and a curl on the green sparkling water that, far away down Channel, beyond the point, swelled into a thousand varying lines of white, while a schooner in the offing might be observed standing out to sea with a double reef in her topsails. One of the crew sluicing the deck with a bucket of water, that eddied round Eugène's feet, pointed her out to his mate with an oath, and the mate, a tall strong negro, grinning hideously, replied "Iss ! very well !"

' The Bashful Maid ' herself, rising buoyantly to each succeeding wave, ere with a dip and toss of her bows she sent the heavy spray-drops splashing over her like a sea-bird, seemed chafing with eagerness to be off. There was but little of the bustle and confusion on board usually produced by clearing out of port. The deck, though wet and slippery, was as clean as a dinner-plate, the yards were squared, the ropes coiled, new sails had been bent, and the last cask of fresh water was swinging over the hold : trim and taut, every spar and every sheet seemed to express "Outward bound," not to mention a blue-Peter flying at the fore.

All this Eugène observing, began to suffer from an uncomfortable sensation in the pit of his stomach, which parched his mouth, depressed his

spirits, and destroyed his appetite. He was not, however, so much affected by it but that he could take note of his fellow-voyagers, an occupation sufficiently interesting when he reflected on the probable result of their preparations. In his experience of life he had never yet seen such an assemblage. The crew had indeed been got together with considerable care, but with utter disregard to nationality or uniformity of any kind. The majority were Englishmen, but there were also Swedes, Dutch, French, Portuguese, a negro, and even a Spaniard on board. The brigantine was strongly manned for her size, and the hands, with scarcely an exception, were stout daring fellows, capable of any exploit and a good many enormities, but such as a bold commander, cool, judicious, and determined, might bring into a very efficient state of discipline. Eugène could not but remark, however, that on the face of each was expressed impatience of delay and an ardent desire to be in blue water. The liberty to go on shore had been stopped, and indeed the pockets of these gentlemen-adventurers, as the humblest of them called themselves, were completely cleaned out. Obviously, therefore, it would be well to lose no time in refilling them.

Leaning over the side, lazily watching the lap and wash of the leaping water, Eugène was rapidly losing himself in his own thoughts, when, rousing up, he felt the Captain's hand on his shoulder and heard the Captain's voice whisper in his ear :—

“Come below with me ; I shall want your assistance by-and-by, and you have had no breakfast yet.”

His qualms took flight at the prospect of fresh excitement, though the offer of breakfast was received with little enthusiasm, and he followed the Captain into his comfortable and well-furnished cabin. Here he learned that, while he was sleeping, George had hailed a fishing-boat returning warily into harbour, and, under pretence of buying fresh fish, boarded her with a bottle or two of spirits and a roll of tobacco. In ten minutes he extracted all the fisherman had to tell, and discovered that a large King's ship was cruising in the offing, watching, as his informant opined, the very port in which they lay. Under these circumstances, Captain George considered it would be prudent to wait till midnight, when they might run out of the harbour, with wind and tide in their favour, and so showing the man-of-war a clean pair of heels, be hull-down and out of sight before sunrise.

“There’s nothing that swims can touch her in squally weather like this,” continued the Captain, “if she can get an hour’s start; and I wouldn’t mind running under his very bolt-sprit, in the dark, if this wind holds. My chief difficulty is about the men. There will be black looks, and something very like mutiny, if I keep them twelve more hours in sight of the beer-shops without liberty for shore. Those drunken rascals too, that we hove aboard last night, will have come to themselves by that time, and we shall perhaps have some trouble in persuading them they are here of their own free will. You must help me, Eugène, all day. Between us we must watch the crew, like a cat watches a mouse. Once we’re in blue water, you’ll have nothing to do but sit in my cabin and amuse yourself.”

The skipper understood the nature of those with whom he had to deal. When the men saw no disposition to get the anchor up, when noon passed and they went to dinner as usual with the brigantine’s head pointing steadily to windward, when another tide ebbed and flowed, but failed to waft them away from the temptations of port, they began to growl freely, without however proceeding to any overt acts of insubordination, and

towards evening they became pacified with the anticipation of weighing anchor before the following day. The hours passed wearily to all on board, excepting perhaps the three Jacks, who, waking simultaneously at sunrise, turned round, perfectly satisfied, to go to sleep again, and so recovered complete possession of their faculties towards the dusk of the evening.

They had been stowed away on some spare bunting outside the door of the Captain's cabin. Their conversation, therefore, though carried on in a low tone, was distinctly audible both to him and Beaudésir, as they sat waiting for midnight and the turn of the tide.

After a few expressions of astonishment, and vague inquiries how they got there, each sailor seemed to realize his position pretty clearly and without much dissatisfaction. Bottle-Jack shrewdly suspected he was once more at the old trade. Smoke-Jack was comforted by the prospect of refilling his empty pockets, and Slap-Jack, whilst vowing eternal fidelity to Alice, seemed impressed with the flattering notion that somehow his own attractions and the good taste of the Admiral's daughter were at the bottom of it all.

The craft, they agreed, was a likely one, the

fittings ship-shape Bristol-fashion, the cruise promised to be prosperous; but such an unheard-of solecism as to weigh without one more drinking-bout in honour of the expedition was not to be thought of; therefore Bottle-Jack opined it was indispensable they should immediately go ashore.

The others agreed without scruple. One difficulty alone presented itself: the quay stood a good quarter of a mile off, and even in harbour it was rather a stormy night for a swim. As Slap-Jack observed, "it couldn't be done comfortable without a plank of some kind; but most like, if they waited till dark, they might make free with the skipper's dingy hanging over the stern!"

"'Tis but totting up another figure or two on the score with old Shiney-face," argued Smoke-Jack, who, considering his profession, was of a frugal turn of mind, and who little knew how completely the purchase-money of his own body and bones had wiped off the chalk behind the door. "Such a voyage as we're a-goin' to make will square longer accounts than ours, though I am uncommon dry, considerin'. Just one more spree on the quiet, you know, my sons, and back to duty again as steady as a sou'-wester. There's no fear they'll weigh without us, a-course?"

"A-course not," grunted old Bottle-Jack, who could scarce have been half-sober yet, to hazard such a suggestion. "The skipper is quite the gentleman, no doubt, and most like when he misses us he'll send the ship's pinnace ashore with his compliments."

"Pinnace be blowed!" retorted Slap-Jack; "any-way you may be sure he won't sail without the dingy;" and in this more reasonable conclusion the others could not but acquiesce.

With a smile on his face, the Captain listened to the further development of their plan. One by one they would creep aft without their shoes, unobserved by the anchor-watch, now sure to be on the forecastle (none of the Jacks had a clear idea of the craft in which they were plotting); if any one could put his hand on a bit of grease it would be useful to make the tackle work noiselessly. When they reached the stern, Slap-Jack should seat himself in the dingy, as being the lightest weight; the others would lower away, and as soon as she touched water, shin down after him and shove off. There was no time to lose, best set about it at once.

Captain George whispered in his companion's ear, "Take my hat and cloak, and go forward to

the hold with a lantern in your hand. Make plenty of noise as you pass those lubbers, but do not let them see your face."

Eugène obeyed, and Captain George, blowing out the lights, set himself to watch at the stern windows.



CHAPTER VI.

“YO-HEAVE-YO !”

IT was pitch dark in the cabin, but although under a cloudy sky there was light enough to discern objects on deck or alongside. As Smoke-Jack observed, stealing aft with bare feet, and in a louder whisper than was prudent, “A good pair of eyes might see as far as a man could heave a bull by the tail.” George had determined to give the crew a lesson, once for all, in the matter of discipline, and felt well pleased to make example of the new comers, who must be supposed as yet ignorant of his system.

So he sat in the dark, pistol in hand, at the stern window, which was open, and watched like the hunter for his prey.

He heard the three Jacks creeping along the

deck overhead, he heard low whispers and a smothered laugh, followed by a few brief expositions as to priority of disembarkation, the language far less polite than the intention; lastly, he heard the tackle by which his boat was made fast running gently over its blocks.

Then he cocked his pistol without noise, and laughed to himself.

Gradually the cabin window was obscured. A dark object passed smoothly down, and revealed in its progress a human figure indistinctly visible above its black horizontal mass, which was indeed the slow-descending boat, containing no less a personage than the adventurous Slap-Jack; also two lines of tackle were dimly visible supporting that boat's head. A turn of the body, as he covered them steadily with his pistol, enabled the Captain to bring these two lines into one.

Hand and eye were equally true. He was sure of his mark before he pulled the trigger. With a flash that lighted up the cabin, and an explosion that filled it with smoke, the bullet cut clean through the “falls” or ropes supporting the boat's head, bringing her perpendicularly on end, and shooting every article she contained—planks, bottom-boards, stretchers, oars, boat-hook, an empty

hencoop, and the astonished occupant—plump into seven fathom of water.

Nor was the consternation created by this alarming capsizing confined to the unfortunate Slap-Jack. His comrades, lowering away industriously from the taffrail, started back in the utmost bewilderment, the anchor-watch rushed aft, persuaded a mutiny had broken out, and in grievous indecision whether to take the skipper's part or assist in cutting his throat. The crew tumbled up the hatchway, and blundered about the deck, asking each other absurd questions, and offering wild suggestions, if anything were really amiss, as to breaking open the spirit-room. Nay, the harbour-guard himself awoke from his nap, emerged from his sentry-box, took a turn on the quay, hailing loudly, and receiving no answer, was satisfied he had been dreaming, so swore and turned in again.

Captain George reloaded his pistol, and sang out lustily, "Man overboard! Show a light on deck there, and heave a rope over the side. Bear a hand to haul him in, the lubber! I don't much think he'll want to try that game in a hurry again!"

Meanwhile, hapless Slap-Jack was incapacitated for the present from that, or indeed any other

game involving physical effort. A plank, falling with him out of the boat, had struck him on the head and stunned him; seventy fathom of water would have floated him no better than seven, and with the first plunge he went down like a stone. Captain George had intended to give him a fright and a ducking; but now, while he stretched his body out of the cabin window, peering over the gloomy water and listening eagerly for the snort and gasp of a swimmer who never came up, he wished with all his heart that his hand had been less steady on the pistol.

Fortunately however, Beaudésir, after he had fulfilled the Captain's orders by personating him at the hold, remained studiously on watch. It was a peculiarity of this man that his faculties seemed always on the stretch, as is often to be observed with those over whom some constant dread impends, or who suffer from the tortures of remorse. At the moment he heard the shot, he sprang to the side, threw off hat and cloak, as if anticipating danger, and kept his eyes eagerly fixed on the water, ready, if need be, for a pounce. The tide was still flowing, the brigantine's head lay to seaward, where all was dark, and fortunately the little light on the ruffled surface was towards the shore.

Slap-Jack's inanimate form was carried inwards by the flood, and crossed the moorings of that huge red buoy which Eugène remembered gazing on listlessly in the morning. Either the contact with its rope woke an instinctive consciousness in the drowning man, or some swirl of the water below brought his body to the surface, but for a few seconds Slap-Jack's form became dimly visible, heaving like a wisp of sea-weed on a wave. In those few seconds Eugène dashed overboard, cleaving the water to reach him with the long springing strokes of a powerful swimmer.

A drowning man is not to be saved, but at the imminent risk of his life who goes in for the rescue, and this gallant feat indeed can only be accomplished by a thorough proficient in the art; so on the present occasion it was well that Beaudésir felt as much at home in the water as on dry land.

How the crew cheered the Frenchman while he was hauled on board with his dripping burden; how the two Jacks who had remained in the brigantine, and were now thoroughly sobered, vowed eternal gratitude to the landsman who had dived for their messmate; how the harbour-guard was once more disturbed by the cheering, and cheered lustily in reply; how

Captain George clapped his comrade on the shoulder while he took him below to change his wet garments, and vowed he was fit to be King of France, adding, with a meaning smile, “If ever I go to school again, I’ll ask them to give me a berth at Avranches in Normandy!”—all this it is unnecessary to relate; but if the Captain gained the respect of the crew by the promptitude with which he resented an attempt at insubordination, the gallant self-devotion of his friend, clerk, supercargo, cabin-passenger, or whatever he was, won their affection and good-will for the rest of the voyage.

This was especially apparent about sunrise, when Captain George beat to quarters and paraded his whole crew on deck, preparatory to weighing anchor and standing out down Channel with a fair wind and a following tide. He calculated that the King’s ship, even if on watch, must be still some distance from land, and he had such implicit confidence in the sailing qualities of his brigantine that if he could only get a fair start he feared a chase from no craft that swam.

Owing to his early education and the experiences of his boyhood, notwithstanding his late career in the service of King Louis, he was a seaman at

heart. In nothing more so than a tendency to idealize the craft he commanded as if it were a living creature, endowed with feelings and even reason. For him, 'The Bashful Maid,' with her exquisite trim, her raking masts, her graceful spars, her long fluttering pennon, and her elaborately-carved figure-head, representing a brazen-faced beauty baring her breast boastfully to the breeze, was less a triumph of design and carpentering, of beams, and blocks, and yarn, and varnish, and tar, than a metaphorical mistress, to be cajoled, commanded, humoured, trusted, above all, admired. He spoke of her as possessing affections, caprices, impulses and self-will. When she answered her helm steadily, and made good weather of it, in a stiff breeze and a heavy sea, she was "behaving admirably"—"she liked the job"—"a man had only to trust her, and give her a new coat of paint now and then, she'd never fail him—not she!" While, on the other hand, she might dive, and plunge, and dip her boltsprit in the brine, shipping seas that swept her decks fore and aft, and she was "only a trifle saucy, the beauty! Carried a weather-helm like the rest of her sex, and must be humoured a bit, till she came round!"

As was the skipper, so were the crew. All these

different natures, men of various nations, dispositions, and characters, were equally childlike in their infatuation about ‘The Bashful Maid.’ The densest of them had imagination enough to invest her with a thousand romantic qualities; even the negro would have furiously resented a word in her disparagement—nay, the three newly-shipped Jacks themselves, men of weighty authority in such matters, caught the infection, and were ready to swear by the brigantine, while it was yet so dark they could scarcely see whether she was a three-masted merchantman or a King’s cutter.

But when the breeze freshened towards sunrise, and the tide was once more on the turn, the regard thus freely accorded to their ship was largely shared by their new shipmate. Beaudésir, passing forward in the grey light of morning, truth to tell moved only by the restlessness of a man not yet accustomed to perpetual motion accompanied by the odours of bilge-water and tar, was greeted with admiring glances and kind words from all alike. Dutchman, Swede, Spaniard, vied with each other in expressions of good-will. Slap-Jack was still below, swaddled in blankets, but his two comrades had tumbled up with the first streaks of dawn, and were loud in their praises; Bottle-Jack vowing

Captain Kidd would have made him first-lieutenant on the spot for such a feat, and Smoke-Jack, with more sincerity than politeness, declaring "he couldn't have believed it of a Frenchman!" Nay, the very negro, showing all his teeth as if he longed to eat him, embarked on an elaborate oration in his honour, couched partly in his native language as spoken on the Gold Coast, partly in a dialect he believed to be English, obscured by metaphor, though sublime doubtless in conception, and prematurely cut short by the shrill whistle of the boatswain, warning all hands without delay to their quarters.

It was an enlivening sight, possessing considerable attractions for such a temperament as Beaudésir's. The clear gap of morning low down on the horizon was widening and spreading every moment over the sky; the breeze, cold and bracing, not yet tempered by the coming sun, freshened sensibly off shore, driving out to sea a grand procession of dark rolling clouds, moving steadily and continuously westward before the day. The lighthouse off the harbour showed like a column of chalk against the dull back-ground of this embankment, vanishing so imperceptibly into light; while to landward, far beyond the low level line of

coast, a faint quiver of purple already mingled with the dim grey outline of the smooth and swelling downs.

In harbour, human life had not yet woke up, but the white sea-birds were soaring and dipping, and wheeling joyously on the wing. The breeze whistled through the tackle, the waves leaped and lashed merrily against her sides, and the crew of the brigantine took their places, clean, well-dressed, brown-faced and bare-footed, on her deck. While the boatswain, who from sheer habit cast an eye continually aloft, observed her truck catch the first gleams of the morning sun, Captain George, carefully attired, issued from his cabin with a telescope under his arm, and made his first and last oration to the crew.

“My lads!” said he, “I’ve beat to quarters, this fine morning, before I get my anchor up, because I want to say a few words to you, and the sooner we understand each other the better! You’ve heard I’m a soldier. So I am! That’s right enough; but, mark you! I dipped my hand in the tar-bucket before I was old enough to carry a sword; so don’t you ever think to come over me with skulking, for I’ve seen that game played out before. Mind you, I don’t believe I’ve got a

skulker on board ; if I have, let him step forward and show himself. Over the side he goes, and I sail without him ! Now, my lads, I know *my* duty and I know *yours*. I'll take care both are done. I'll have no grumbling, and no quarrelling. If any man has a complaint to make, let him come to me, and out with it. A quarrelsome chap with his messmates is generally a shy cock when you put him down to fight. I'll have man-of-war's discipline aboard. You all know what that is, and those that don't like it must lump it. Last night there were three of you tried to take French leave and to steal my boat ; I stopped that game with a little friend I keep in my belt. Look ye, my sons, next bout I'll cover the *man* instead of the tackles ! I know who they are, well enough, but I mean to forget as soon as ever the anchor's up. I'll have a clean bill of health to take out into blue water. Now, my lads, attend to me ! We've a long cruise before us, but we've a craft well-provisioned, well-found, and, I heartily believe, well-manned. Whatever prizes we take, whatever profit we make on the cargo, from skipper to ship's-boy, every one shall have his share according to the articles hung up in my cabin. We *may* have to fight and we may *not* ; it's the last job you're

likely to shirk ; but mind this—*one* skipper’s enough for *one* ship. I’ll have no *lawyer* sail with *me*, and no opinions ‘whether or no’ before the mast. If you think of disobeying orders, just remember it’s a short walk from my berth to the powder-room, and the clink of a flint will square all accounts between captain and crew. If I’m not to be skipper, nobody else shall, and what I say I mean. Lastly, no man is to get drunk except in port. And now, my lads! Here’s a fair wind and a following tide! Before we get the fiddle up for a ‘Stamp and go, cheerily ho!’ we’ll give three cheers for ‘The Bashful Maid,’ and then shake out every rag of canvas and make a good run while the breeze holds!”

The men cheered with a will. The Captain’s notions of sea-oratory were founded on a knowledge of his audience, and answered his purpose better than the most finished style of rhetoric. As the shouting died out, a strong voice was heard, demanding “one cheer more for the skipper.” It was given enthusiastically—Slap-Jack, who had sneaked on deck with his head bandaged, having taken this sailor-like method of showing he bore no malice for a ducking, and was indeed only desirous that his late prank should be overlooked.

Nevertheless, in the hurry and confusion of getting the anchor up, he contrived to place himself at Beaudésir's side and to grasp him cordially by the hand.

"You *be* a good chap," said this honest seaman, with a touch of feeling that he hid under an affectation of exceeding roughness ; "as good a chap as ever broke a biscuit ! Look ye, mate ; my name's Slap-Jack ; so long as I can show my number, when anything's up, you sings out 'Slap-Jack !' and if I don't answer Slap-Jack *it is !* why——"

The imprecation with which this peculiar acknowledgment concluded did not render it one whit more intelligible to Beaudésir, who gathered enough, however, from the speaker's vehemence to feel that he had made at least one stanch friend among the crew. By the time he had realized this consoling fact, the brigantine's head, released from the restraint of her cable, swung round to leeward, her strong new sails filled steadily with the breeze, and while the ripple gurgled louder and louder round her bows, already tossing and plunging through the increasing swell, the quay, the lighthouse, the long low spit of land, the town, the downs themselves seemed to glide

quietly away; and Beaudésir, despite the beauty of the scene and the excitement of his position, became uncomfortably conscious of a strange desire to retire into a corner, lay himself down at full length, and die, if need be, unobserved.

A waft of savoury odours from the cook's galley, where the men's breakfasts were prepared, did nothing towards allaying this untimely despondency, and after a short struggle he yielded, as people always do yield in such cases, and staggering into the cabin, pillowed his head on a couch, and gave himself over to despair.

Ere he raised it again ‘The Bashful Maid,’ making an excellent run down Channel in a south-westerly course, was already a dozen leagues out at sea.



CHAPTER VII.

‘THE BASHFUL MAID.’

IF Captain George kept a log, as is probable, or Eugène Beaudésir a diary, as is possible, I have no intention of copying it. In the history of individuals, as of nations, the exception is Stir, the rule Stagnation. There are long links in the Silver Cord, smooth, polished, uniform, one exactly like the other, ere its sameness is varied by the carving of a boss or the flash of a gem. It is only here and there that lifelike figures and spirit-stirring scenes start from the dead surface of the Golden Bowl. Perhaps, when both are broken, neither brilliancy nor workmanship, but sterling worth of metal, shall constitute the true value of each.

‘The Bashful Maid’ found her share of favouring

winds and baffling breezes; trim and weatherly, she made the best of them all. Her crew, as they gained confidence in their skipper and became well acquainted amongst themselves, worked her to perfection. In squally weather, she had the great advantage of being over-manned, and could therefore carry the broadest surface of canvas it was possible to show. After a few stormy nights all shook into their places, and every man found himself told off to the duty he was best able to perform. The late Captain of Musketeers had the knack of selecting men, and of making them obey him. His last joined hands were perhaps the best of his whole ship's company. Bottle-Jack became boatswain's mate, Smoke-Jack, gunner, and Slap-Jack, captain of the foretop. These three were still fast friends and sworn adherents of Beaudésir. The latter, though he had no ostensible rank or office, seemed, next to the skipper himself, the most influential and the most useful person on board. He soon picked up enough knowledge of navigation to bring his mathematical acquirements into play. He kept the accounts of stores and cargo. He possessed a slight knowledge of medicine and surgery. He played the violin with a taste and feeling that enchanted the

Spaniard, his only rival in this accomplishment, and caused many a stout heart to thrill with unaccustomed thoughts of green nooks and leafy copses, of laughing children and cottage-gardens, and summer evenings at home ; lastly, the three Jacks, his fast friends, found him an apt pupil in lessons relating to sheets and tacks, blocks and braces, yards and spars, in fine, all the practical mysteries of seamanship.

During stirring times, such as the first half of the eighteenth century, a brigantine like 'The Bashful Maid,' well-armed, well-manned, commanded by a young adventurous Captain having letters of marque in his cabin, and no certain knowledge that peace had yet been proclaimed with Spain, was not likely long to preserve her sails unbleached by use nor the paint and varnish undimmed on her hull. Not many months elapsed ere she was very different in appearance from the yacht-like craft that ran past the Needles, carrying Eugène Beaudésir prone and helpless as a log in her after-cabin. He could scarcely believe himself the same man when, bronzed, robust, and vigorous, feeling every inch a sailor, he paced her deck under the glowing stars and the mellow moonlight of the tropics. Gales had been weathered since

then, shots fired, prizes taken, and that career of adventure embarked on which possesses so strange a fascination for the majority of mankind, partly, I think, from its permanent uncertainty, partly from its pandering to their self-esteem. A few more swoops, another prize or two taken, pillaged, but suffered to proceed if not worth towing into port, and the cruise would have been so successful, that already the men were calculating their share of profit and talking as if their eventual return to Britain was no longer a wild impossibility. Everything, too, had as yet been done according to fair usage of war. No piracy, no cruelty, nothing that could justify a British three-decker in capturing the brigantine, to impress her crew and hang her captain at his own yard-arm. Eugène's counsels had so far prevailed with George that he had resolved on confining himself to the legitimate profits of a privateer, and not overstepping the narrow line of demarcation that distinguished him from a pirate.

While, however, some of her crew had been killed and some wounded, 'The Bashful Maid' herself had by no means emerged scatheless from her encounters. Eugène was foolish enough to experience a thrill of pride while he marked the

grim holes, planked and caulked, in her sides; the workmanlike splicing of such yards and spars as had not suffered too severely for repair, and the carefully-mended foresail, now white and weather-bleached, save where the breadths of darker, newer canvas betrayed it had been riddled by round-shot.

But soon his impressionable temperament, catching the influence of the hour, threw off its warlike thoughts and abandoned itself to those gentler associations that could hardly fail to be in the ascendant.

The night was such as is only to be seen in the tropics. Above, like golden lamps, the stars were flaming rather than twinkling in the sky; while low down on the horizon a broad moon, rising from the sea, spread a lustrous path along the gently-heaving waves to the very ship's side; a path on which myriads of glittering fairies seemed to dance and revel, and disappear in changing sparkles of light.

Through all this blaze of beauty, the brigantine glided smoothly and steadily on her course. For several days and nights not a sail had been altered, not a rope shifted, before that soft and balmy breeze. The men had nothing to do but tell each

other interminable yarns and smoke. It was the fair side of the medal, the bloom on the fruit, the smooth of the profession, this enchanted voyage over an enchanted sea.

Eugène revelled in its charm, but with his enjoyment was mingled that quiet melancholy so intimately associated with all beauty in those hearts (and how many of them are there!) which treasure up an impossible longing, a dream that can never come to pass. It is a morbid sentiment, no doubt, which can thus extract from the loveliest scenes of nature, and even from the brightest triumphs of art, a strange wild ecstasy of pain, possessing a fascination of its own; but it is a sentiment to which the most generous and the most noble minds are peculiarly susceptible; a sentiment that in itself denotes excessive capability for the happiness denied or withheld. Were it better for them to be of duller spirit and coarser fibre, callous to the spur, unequal to the effort? Who knows? I think Beaudésir would not willingly have parted with the sensibility from which he experienced so much pain, from the memories on which, at moments like these, under a moonlit sky, he brooded and dwelt so fondly, yet so despondently, to have obtained in exchange the inex-

haustible good-humour of Slap-Jack or the imperturbable self-command of Captain George.

Immersed in his own thoughts, he did not observe the latter leave his cabin, walk from sheer habit to the binnacle in order to satisfy himself the brigantine was lying her course, and glance over the side to measure her speed through the water, and he started when the Captain placed his hand familiarly on his shoulder, and jeered him good-humouredly for his preoccupation. These men, whose acquaintance had commenced with important benefits conferred and received on both sides, were now thrown together by circumstances which brought out the finer qualities of both. They had learned thoroughly to depend on each other, and had become fast friends. Perhaps their strongest link was the dissimilarity of their characters. To Beaudésir's romantic and impressionable temperament there had been, from the first, something very imposing in the vigorous and manly nature of Captain George; and the influence of the latter became stronger day by day, when he proved himself as calm, courageous, and capable, on the deck of a privateer as he had appeared in his quarters at Paris commanding a company of the Royal Guards.

For George, again, with his frank, soldier-like manner and somewhat abrupt address, which seemed impatient of anything like delicacy or over-refinement, there was, nevertheless, an unspeakable charm in his friend's half-languid, half-fiery, and wholly romantic disposition, redeemed by a courage no danger could shake, and an address with his weapons few men could withstand. The Captain was not demonstrative, far from it, and would have been ashamed to confess how much he valued the society of that pale, studious, effeminate youth, in looks, in manner, in simplicity of habits so much younger than his actual years; who was so often lost in vague day-dreams, and loved to follow up such wild and speculative trains of thought; but who could point the brigantine's bow-chasers more accurately than the gunner himself; who had learned how to hand, reef, and steer before he had been six weeks on board.

Their alliance was the natural consequence of companionship between two natures of the same material, so to speak, but of different fabric. Their respective intellects represented the masculine and feminine types. Each supplying that which the other wanted, they amalgamated accordingly. Beaudésir looked up to the Musketeer as his ideal

of perfection in manhood ; Captain George loved Eugène like a brother, and trusted him without reserve.

It was pleasant after the turmoil and excitement of the last few weeks to walk the deck in that balmy region under a serene and moonlit sky, letting their thoughts wander freely to scenes so different on far-distant shores, while they talked of France, and Paris, and Versailles, and a thousand topics all connected with dry land. But Eugène, though he listened with interest, and never seemed tired of confidences relating to his companion's own family and previous life, frankly and freely imparted, refrained from such confessions in return ; and George was still as ignorant of his friend's antecedents as on that memorable day when the pale, dark youth accompanied Bras-de-Fer to their Captain's quarters, to be entered on the roll of the Grey Musketeers, after running poor Flanconnade through the body. That they had once belonged to this famous *corps d'élite* neither of them seemed likely to forget. Its merits and its services formed the one staple subject of discourse when all else failed. As in his quarters at Paris he had kept the model of a similar brigantine for his own private solace, so now, in the cabin of 'The Bashful

Maid,' the skipper treasured up with the greatest care, in a stout sea-chest, a handsome full-dress uniform, covered with velvet and embroidery, flaunting with grey ribbons, and having a coating of thin paper over its silver lace.

There was one topic of conversation, however, on which these young men had never yet embarked, and this is the more surprising, considering their age and the habits of those warriors amongst whom they were so proud to have been numbered. This forbidden subject was the charm of the other sex, and it was perhaps because each felt himself so constituted as to be keenly alive to its power that neither ventured an allusion to the great influence by which, during the first half of life, men's fortunes, characters, happiness, and eventual destiny are more or less affected. It required a fair breeze, a summer sea, and a moonlight night in the tropics to elicit their opinions on such matters, and the manly, roughspoken skipper was the first to broach a theme that had been already well-nigh exhausted by the watch on deck—gathered on the fore-castle in tranquil enjoyment of a cool, serene air and a welcome interval of repose.

Old Turenne's system of tactics had been declared exploded; the Duke of Marlborough's

character criticised ; Cavalli's last opera canvassed and condemned. Captain George took two turns of the deck in silence, stopped short at the taffrail, and looked thoughtfully over the stern—

“What is to be the end of it?” he asked abruptly. “More fighting, of course ! More prizes, more doubloons, and then ? After all, I believe there are things to make a man's life happier than even such a brigantine as this.”

“There is heaven on earth, and there is heaven above,” answered the other, in his dreamy, half-earnest, half-speculative way ; “and some men, not always the hardest-hearted nor the most vicious, are to be shut out from both. Calvin is a disheartening casuist, but I believe Calvin is right !”

“Steady there !” replied George. “Nothing shall make me believe but that a brave man can sail what course he will, provided his charts are trustworthy and he steers by them. Nothing is *impossible*, Eugène. If I had thought that, I should have lost heart long ago.”

“And then ?” asked Beaudésir, sadly.

“And then,” repeated the Captain, with a shudder, “I might have become a brute rather than a man. Do you remember the British schooner

we retook from those Portuguese rovers, and the *mustee** who commanded them? I tell you I *hate* to think it possible, and yet I believe a man utterly without hope might come to be such a wretch as that!"

"*You* never would," said Beaudésir, "and I never should; I *know* it. Even hope may be dispensed with if memory remains. My pity is for those who have neither."

"I could not live without hope," resumed the Captain, cheerily. "I own I do hope most sincerely, at some future time, for a calmer and happier lot than this; a lot that would also make the happiness of another; and that other so gentle, so trusting, and so true!"

Eugène looked in his face surprised. Then he smiled brightly, and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"It will come!" he exclaimed; "never doubt it for a moment. It will come! Do you remember what I said to you of my skill in fortune-telling? I repeat, success is written in your face. What you really wish and strive to attain is as sure to arrive at last as a fair wind in the trades or a flood-tide at full moon."

* The progeny of a white and a Quadroon, sometimes called an Octoroon.

"I hope so," returned the Captain; "I believe it. I suppose I am as bold as my neighbours, and luckily it never comes across me, when there's anything to do; but sometimes my heart fails when I think, if I *should* go down and lose my number, how she'll sit and wonder, poor thing, why I never come back!"

"Courage, my Captain!" said Eugène, cheerily affecting the tone and manner of their old corps. "Courage. *En avant! à la Mousquetaire!* You will lose nothing, not even the cargo; we shall return with both pockets full of money. You will buy a château. There will be a fête at your wedding: I shall bring there my violin, and, believe me, I shall rejoice in your happiness as if it were my own."

"She is so young, so beautiful, so gentle," continued the Captain; "I could not bear that her life should be darkened, whatever comes of me. If, at last, the great happiness *does* arrive, Eugène, I shall not forget my friend. Château or cottage, you will be welcome with your violin. You would admire her as I do; we both think alike on so many subjects. So young, so fresh, so beautiful! I wish you could see her. I am not sure but that you *have* seen her. Do you remember the day——?"

What further confidences the skipper was about to impart were here cut short by a round of applause from the fore-castle, apparently arising from some proposal much approved by the whole assemblage. The Captain, with his friend, paused to listen. It was a request that Bottle-Jack should sing, and seemed not unfavourably received by that veteran. After many excuses and much of a mock modesty, to be observed under similar conditions in the most refined societies, he took his quid from his cheek, and cleared his voice with great pomp ere he embarked on a ditty of which the subject conveyed a delicate compliment to the proclivities of his friend Smoke-Jack, who had originated the call, and which he sang in that flat, monotonous, and dispiriting key, only to be accomplished, I firmly believe, by an able seaman in the daily exercise of his profession. He designated it ‘The Real Trinidado,” and it ran as follows :—

“Oh! when I was a lad,
Says my crusty old dad,
Says he,—‘Jack! you must stick to the spade, oh!’
But he grudged me my prog,
And he grudged me my grog,
And my pipe of the real Trinidado.

‘Says my Syousan to me,—
‘Jack, if you goes to sea,

I'll be left but a desolate maid, oh !'

Then I answers her—' Sue !

Can't I come back to you

When I'm done with the old Trinidado ?'

" So to sea we clears out,

And the ship's head, no doubt,

Sou'-west and by sou' it was laid, oh !

For the isles of the sun,

Where there's fiddlers and fun,

And no end of the real Trinidado.

" Says our skipper, says he,

' Be she close-hauled or free,

She'd behave herself in a tornado !'

So he handles the ship

With a canful of flip,

And a pipe of the real Trinidado.

" She's a weatherly craft,

Werry wet, fore-and-aft,

And she rolls like a liquorish jade, oh !

But she steers werry kind,

On a course to her mind,

When she's bound for the isle Trinidado.

" Soon a sail we espies,

Says the skipper—' My eyes !

That's the stuff for us lads of the trade, oh !

Bales of silk in his hold,

Casks of rum—maybe gold—

Not forgetting the real Trinidado !'

" Then it's ' Stand by ! My sons !

Steady ! Run out your guns—

We've the Don's weather-gage. Who's afraid, oh ?'

So we takes him aback,

He is ours in a crack,

And we scuttles him off Trinidado !

“Now, here’s to the crew !
 And the skipper ! and Sue !
 And here’s ‘Luck to the boys of the blade, oh !
 May they ne’er want a glass,
 A fair wind, a fair lass !
 Nor a pipe of the real Trinidado !’

The applause elicited by this effort was loud and long. Ere it subsided, George looked more than once anxiously to windward. Then he went to his cabin and consulted the barometer, after which he reappeared on deck and whispered in Eugène’s ear—

“I am going to caulk it for an hour or two. Hold on, unless there’s any change in the weather, and be sure you come below and rouse me out at eight bells.”



CHAPTER VIII.

DIRTY WEATHER.



T eight bells, the Captain came on deck again, glancing once more somewhat anxiously astern. Not a cloud was to be seen in the moonlit sky, and the breeze that had blown so steadily, though so softly, for weeks, was sinking gradually, dying out, as it were, in a succession of gentle, peaceful sighs. Eugène, with the weather-wisdom of a man who had been but a few months at sea, rather inclined to think they might be becalmed. The crew did not trouble themselves about the matter. Every rag the brigantine could show was already set, and if a sail flapped idly against the mast, it soon drew again as before, to propel them smoothly on their course.

Moreover, a topic had been lately broached on the fore-castle, of engrossing interest to every man before the mast. It affected no less delicate a subject than the beauty of 'The Bashful Maid' herself, as typified by her figure-head. This work of art had unfortunately suffered a slight defacement in one of their late exploits, nearly the whole of its nose having been carried away by an untoward musket-shot. Such a loss had been replaced forthwith by the ship's carpenter, who supplied his idol with a far straighter, severer, and more classical feature than was ever yet beheld on the human countenance. Its proportions were proclaimed perfect by the whole crew; but though the artist's execution was universally approved, his florid style of colouring originated many conflicting opinions and much loud discussion on the first principles of imitative art. The carpenter was a man of decided ideas, and made large use of a certain red paint nearly approaching vermilion in his flesh tints. 'The Bashful Maid's' nose, therefore, bloomed with a hue as rosy as her cheeks, and these, until toned down by wind and weather, had been an honest scarlet. None of the critics ventured to dispute the position that the carpenter's theory was sound. Slap-Jack, indeed,

with a lively recollection of her wan face when he took leave of his Alice, suggested that for his part he liked them "a little less gaudy about the gills;" but this heresy was ignominiously coughed down at once. It was merely a question as to whether the paint was, or was not, laid on too thick, and each man argued according to his own experience of the real human subject.

All the older hands (particularly Bottle-Jack, who protested vehemently that the figure-head of 'The Bashful Maid,' so far from being a representation of feminine beauty, was in fact an elevated ideal of that seductive quality, a very model, to be imitated, though hardly possible to be approached) were in favour of red noses, as adding warmth and expression to the female face. Their wives, their sweethearts, their sisters, their mothers, their grandmothers, all had red noses, and were careful to keep up the colouring by the use of comforting stimulants. "What," said their principal speaker, "was the pints of a figur'-head, as laid down in the song? and no man on this deck was a-goin' to set up his opinion again *that*, he should think! Wasn't 'em this here?—

"'Eyes as black as sloes,
Cheeks like any rose.'

And if the song was payed-out further, which it might or it might *not*, d'ye see, wouldn't the poet have naturally added—

“With a corresponding nose?”

It was a telling argument, and although two or three of the foretop-men, smart young fellows, whose sweethearts had not yet taken to drinking, seemed disinclined to side with Slap-Jack, it insured a triumphant majority, which ought to have set the question at rest, even without the conclusive opinion delivered by the negro.

“Snowball,” said Bottle-Jack, “you’ve not told us *your* taste. Now you’re impartial, you are, a-cause you can’t belong to either side. What say ye, man? Red or white? Sing out and hoist your ensign!”

The black nodded, grinned, and voted—

“Iss! berry well,” said he; “like ’em white berry well; like ’em red berry better!”

At this interesting juncture, the men were a good deal surprised by an order from the Captain to “turn all hands up and shorten sail.” They rose from the deck, wondering and grumbling. Two or three, who had been sleeping below, came tumbling up with astonished faces and less willing steps than usual. All seemed more or less

discontented, and muttered to each other that "the skipper must be mad to shorten sail at midnight with a bright moon, and in a light breeze, falling every moment to a calm!"

They went about the job somewhat unwillingly, and indeed were so much less ready than usual as to draw a good deal of animadversion from the deck, something in this style—

"Now, my lads, bear a hand, and look smart. Foretop there! What are you about with that foretopsail? Lower away on your after-haul-yards! Easy! Hoist on those fore-haulyards, ye lubbers! Away with it, men! Altogether, and *with a will!* Why, you are going to sleep over it! I'd have done it smarter with the crew of a collier!"

To all which remonstrances, it is needless to say, the well-disciplined Slap-Jack made no reply; only once, finding a moment to look to windward from his elevated position as captain of the fore-top, and observing a white mist-like scud low down on the horizon, he whispered quietly to his mate, then busied with a reef-knot—

"Blowed if he bain't right, arter all, Jem! We'll be under courses afore the sun's up. If we don't strike topmasts, they'll be struck for us, I

shouldn't wonder. I see *him* once afore," explained Slap-Jack, jerking his head in the direction of the coming squall; "and he's a Snorter, mate, that's about wot *he* is!"

The Captain's precautions were not taken too soon. The topsails were hardly close reefed, all the canvas not absolutely required to steer the brigantine had been hardly taken in, ere the sky was darkened as if the moon had been suddenly snuffed out, and the squall was upon them. 'The Bashful Maid' lay over, gunwale under, driving fiercely through the seething water, which had not yet risen to the heavy sea that was too surely coming. She plunged, she dived, she strained, she quivered like some living thing striving earnestly and patiently for its life. The rain hissed down in sheets, the lightning lit up the slippery deck, the dripping pale-faced men, the bending spars, the straining tackle, and the few feet of canvas that must be carried at any price. In the quick-succeeding flashes every man on board could see that the others did their duty. From the Captain, holding on by one hand, composed and cheerful, with his speaking-trumpet in the other, to the ship's boy, with his little bare feet and curling yellow hair, there was not a skulker amongst

them ! They remembered it long afterwards with honest pride, and 'The Bashful Maid' behaved beautifully ! Yes, in defiance of the tempestuous squall, blowing as it seemed from all points of the compass at once ; in defiance of crackling lightning, and thunder crashing overhead ere it rolled away all round the horizon, reverberating over the ocean for miles ; in defiance of black darkness and lurid gleams, and drenching rain, and the cruel raging sea rising every moment and running like a mill-race, Captain and crew were alike confident they would weather it, and they did.

But it was a sadly worn and strained and shattered craft that lay upon the fast subsiding water, some six hours after the squall, under the glowing sun of a morning in the tropics ; a sun that glinted on the sea till its heaving surface looked all one sheet of burnished gold ; a sun that was truly comforting to the drenched and wearied crew, although its glare exposed pitilessly the whole amount of damage the brigantine had sustained. That poor 'Bashful Maid' was as different now from the trim yacht-like craft that sailed past the Needles, gaudy with paint and gleaming with varnish, as is the dead sea-bird, lying helpless and draggled on the wave, from the same creature

soaring white and beautiful, in all its pride of power and plumage, against the summer-sky.

There was but one opinion, however, amongst the crew as to the merits of the craft, and the way she had been handled. Not one of them, and it was a great acknowledgment for sailors to make, who never think their present berth the best—not one of them had ever before sailed in any description of vessel which answered her helm so readily or could lay her head so near the wind's eye—not one of them had ever seen a furious tropical squall weathered so scientifically and so successfully, nor could call to mind a Captain who seemed so completely master of his trade. The three Jacks compared notes on the subject before turning in about sunrise, when the worst was indeed over, but the situation, to a landsman at least, would have yet appeared sufficiently precarious. The brigantine was still driving before a heavy sea, showing just so much canvas as should save her from being becalmed in its trough, overtaken and buried under the pursuing enemy. The gale was still blowing with a fury that offered the best chance of its force soon becoming exhausted, and two men were at the helm under the immediate supervision of the skipper himself.

Nevertheless, the three stout tars betook themselves to their berth without the slightest anxiety, well aware that each would be sleeping like a child almost before he could clamber into his hammock.

But while he took off and wrung his dripping sea-coat, Bottle-Jack observed sententiously to his mates—

“Captain Kidd could fight a ship, my sons, and Captain Kidd could sail a ship. Now if you asks my opinion, it’s this here—In such a squall as we’ve a-weathered, or pretty nigh a-weathered, Captain Kidd, he’d a-run afore it at once, an’ he’d a bin in it now. This here young skipper, he laid to, so long as she *could* lay to, an’ he never run till he couldn’t fight no more. That’s why he’ll be out on it afore the middle watch. Belay now, I’m a-goin’ to caulk it for a spell.”

Neither Smoke-Jack nor Slap-Jack were in a humour for discussion, and each cheerfully conceded the Captain’s judicious seamanship; the former expressing his opinion that nothing in the King’s navy could touch the brigantine, and the latter, recurring to his previous experience, rejoicing that he no longer sailed under the gallant but unseamanlike Captain Delaval.

The honest fellows, thoroughly wearied, were soon in the land of dreams. Haunted no more by visions of dancing spars, wet slippery ropes, yards dipping in the waves, and flapping sails struggling wildly for the freedom that must be their own destruction, and the whole ship's company's doom. No, their thoughts were of warm sanded parlours, cheerful coal-fires, endless pipes of tobacco, messmates singing, women dancing, the unrestrained festivities and flowing ale-jugs of the Fox and Fiddle. Perhaps, to the imagination of the youngest, a fair pale face, loving and tearful, stood out from all these jovial surroundings, and Slap-Jack felt a purer and a better man while, though but in imagination, he clasped his true and tender Alice to his heart once more.



CHAPTER IX.

PORT WELCOME.

IT was a refreshing sight to behold Slap-Jack, "rigged," as he was pleased to term it, "to the nines," in the extreme of sea-dandyism, enacting the favourite part of a "liberty-man" ashore.

Nothing had been left undone for the brilliancy of his exterior that could be achieved by scrubbing, white linen, and robust health. The smart young captain of the foretop seemed to glow and sparkle in the vertical sun, as he stood on the quay of Port Welcome, and cast a final glance of professional approval on the yards he had lately squared to a nicety and the trim of such gear and tackle aloft as seemed his own especial pride and care.

'The Bashful Maid,' after all the buffetings she

had sustained, particularly from the late squall, having made her port in one of the smallest and most beautiful of the West India islands, now lay at anchor, fair and motionless, like a living thing sleeping on the glistening sea. It yet wanted some hours of noon, nevertheless the sun had attained a power that seemed to bake the very stones on the quay, and warmed the clear limpid water fathom deep. Even Slap-Jack protested against the heat, as he lounged and rolled into the town, to find it swarming with negroes of both sexes, sparingly clothed, but with such garments as they did wear glowing in the gaudiest colours, and carrying on their hard, woolly heads baskets containing eggs, kids, poultry, fruit, vegetables, and every kind of market produce in the island. That island was indeed one of those jewels of the Caribbean Sea to which no description can do justice.

For the men left on board 'The Bashful Maid,' now heaving drowsily at her anchor, it realized, with its vivid and varied hues, its fantastic outlines, its massive brakes, its feathery palms, its luxuriant redundancy of vegetation, trailing and drooping to the sparkling water's-edge, a sailor's idea of Paradise; while for the three Jacks rolling into the little town of Port Welcome, with its white houses

straggling streets, frequent drinking-shops, and swarming population—black, white, and coloured, it represented the desirable haven of Fiddler's Green, where they felt, no doubt, they had arrived before their time. Slap-Jack made a remark to that effect, which was cordially endorsed by his comrades as they turned into the main thoroughfare of the town, and agreed that, in order to enjoy their holiday to the utmost, it was essential to commence with something to drink all round.

Now, 'The Bashful Maid' having been already a few days in port, had in that time disposed of a considerable portion of her cargo, and such an event as the arrival of a saucy brigantine, combining the attractions of a man-of-war with the advantages of a free-trader, not being an every-day occurrence among the population of Port Welcome, much stir, excitement, and increase of business was the result. The French store-keepers bid eagerly for wares of European manufacture, the French planters sent their slaves down in dozens to purchase luxuries only attainable from beyond sea, while the negroes, grinning from ear to ear, jostled and scolded each other in their desire to barter yams, plantains, fruit, poultry, and even, on occasion, pieces of actual money, for scarfs, gloves, per-

fumes, and ornaments—the tawdrier the better, which they thought might add to the gloss of their black skins, and set off their quaint, honest, ugly, black faces to advantage.

Here and there, too, a Carib, one of the aboriginal lords of the island, distinguished by his bronze colour, his grave demeanour—so unlike the African, and his disfigured nose, artificially flattened from infancy, would stalk solemnly away, rich in the possession of a few glass beads or a bit of tinsel, for which he had bartered all his worldly wealth, and which, like more civilized people, he valued, not at its intrinsic worth, but at its cost price. The three Jacks observed the novelties which surrounded them from different points of view according to their different characters, yet with a cool imperturbable demeanour essentially professional. To men of their calling, nothing ever appears extraordinary. They see so many strange sights in different countries, and have so little time to become acquainted with the wonders they behold, that they soon acquire a profound and philosophical indifference to everything beyond their ordinary range of experience, persuaded that the astonishment of to-day is pretty sure to be exceeded by the astonishment of to-morrow. Neither can they easily discover any-

thing perfectly and entirely new, having usually witnessed something of the same kind before, or heard it circumstantially described at considerable length by a messmate; so that a seaman is but little impressed with the sight of a foreign town, of which, indeed, he acquires in an hour or two a knowledge not much more superficial than he has of his native village.

Bottle-Jack was in the habit of giving his opinion, as he expressed it, "free." That it was complimentary to Port Welcome, his comrades gathered from the following sentiment:—

"I'm a' gettin' strained and weather-worn," observed the old seaman, impressively, "and uncommon dry besides. Tell ye what it is, mates—one more cruise, and blowed if I won't just drop my anchor here, and ride out the rest of my time all snug at my moorings."

Smoke-Jack turned his quid with an expression of intense disgust.

"And get spliced to a nigger, old man!" said he, argumentatively. "Never go for to say it! I'm not a-goin' to dispute as this here's a tidy bit of a island enough, and safe anchorage. Likewise, as I've been told by them as tried it, plenty to drink, and good. Nor I won't say but what a craft might

put in here for a spell to refit, do a bit of caulking, and what not. But for dry-dock, mate, never go for to say it. Why you couldn't get anything like a decent missis, man, hereaway; an' think o' the price o' beer!"

"Regardin' a missis," returned the other, reflectively, "'tain't the craft wot crowds the most canvas as makes the best weather, mate, and at my years a man looks less to raking masts an' a gay figur'-head than to good tonnage and wholesome breadth of beam. Now, look ye here, mates—wot say ye to this here craft?—her with the red ensign at the main, as is layin' to, like, with her fore-sheet to windward and her helm one turn down?"

While he spoke, he pointed to our old acquaintance, Celandine, who was cheapening fancy articles at a store that spread its goods out under an awning far into the middle of the modest street. The Quadroon was, as usual, gorgeously dressed, wearing the scarlet turban that covered her still black hair majestically, as a queen carries her diadem. Like the coloured race in general, she seemed to have renewed her youth under a tropical sun, and at a short distance, particularly in the eyes of Bottle-Jack, appeared a fine-looking woman, with pretensions to the remains of beauty still.

The three seamen, of course, ranged up alongside

for careful criticism, but Célandine's attention was by no means to be distracted from the delightful business of shopping she had on hand. Shawls, scarfs, fans, gloves, tawdry jewels, and perfumery, lay heaped in dazzling profusion on a shelf before her, and the African blood danced in her veins with childish glee at the tempting sight. The store-keeper, a French Creole, with sharp features, sallow complexion, and restless, down-looking black eyes, taking advantage of her eagerness, asked three times its value for every article he pointed out; but Célandine, though profuse, was not inexperienced, and dearly loved, moreover, the feminine amusement of driving a bargain. Much expostulation therefore, contradiction, wrangling, and confusion of tongues was the result.

The encounter seemed at the warmest, and the French Creole, notwithstanding his villainous countenance and unscrupulous assertions, was decidedly getting the worst of it, when Slap-Jack's quick eye detected amongst the wares exposed for sale certain silks and other stuffs which had formed part of 'The Bashful Maid's' cargo, and had, indeed, been wrested by the strong hand from a Portuguese trader, after a brisk chase and a running fight, which cost the brigantine a portion of her bolt-sprit and two of

her smartest hands. The chest containing these articles had been started in unloading, so that its contents had sustained much damage from seawater. It was a breadth of stained satin out of this very consignment that the Creole storekeeper now endeavoured to persuade Célandine she would do well to purchase at an exorbitant valuation.

Slap-Jack, like many of his calling, had picked up a smattering of negro-French, and could understand the subject of dispute sufficiently to interfere, a course from which he was not to be dissuaded by his less impressionable companions.

“Let her be!” growled Smoke-Jack. “Wot call have *you* now to come athwart-hawse of that there jabbering mounseer, as a man might say, dredging in his own fishing-ground? It’s no use hailing her, I tell ye, mate, I knows the trim on ’em; may-be she’ll lay her foresail aback, and stand off-and-on till sun-down, then just when a man least expects it, she’ll up stick, shake out every rag of canvas, and run for port. Bless ye, young *and* old, fair *and* foul, black, white, *and* coloured, nigger, quadroon, *and* mustee—I knows ’em all, and not one on ’em but carries a weather-helm in a fresh breeze, and steers wild and wilful in a sea-way.”

But Slap-Jack was not to be diverted from his

purpose. With considerable impudence, and an impressive sea-bow, he walked up to Célandine under the eyes of his admiring shipmates, and, mustering the best negro-French at his command, warned her in somewhat incomprehensible jargon of the imposition intended to be practised. Now it happened that Port Welcome, and the island in which it was situated, had been occupied in its varying fortunes by French, Spaniards, and English so equally, that these languages, much corrupted by negro pronunciation, were spoken indiscriminately, and often altogether. It was a great relief, therefore, to Slap-Jack that Célandine thanked him politely for his interposition in his native tongue, and when she looked into the young foretop-man's comely brown face, she found herself so fascinated with something she detected there as to continue the conversation in tolerably correct English, for the purpose of improving their acquaintance. The seaman congratulated himself on having made so happy a discovery, while his friends looked on in mute admiration of the celerity with which he had completed his conquest.

"He's a smart chap, mate," enunciated Bottle-Jack, with a glance of intense approval at the two figures receding up the sunny street, as Célandine

marched their companion off, avowedly for the purpose of refreshing him with cooling drinks in return for his good-nature—"a smart young chap, and can hold his own with the best of 'em as ever hoisted a petticoat, silk or dowlas. See now, that's the way to do it in these here latitudes! First he hails 'em, speaking up like a man, then he ranges alongside, and gets the grapplers out, and so tows his prize into port in a pig's whisper. He's a smart young chap, I tell ye, and a match for the sauciest craft as ever sailed under false colours, and hoisted a red pennant at the main."

But Smoke-Jack shook his head, and led his shipmate, nothing loth, into a tempting store-house, redolent with the fragrance of limes, tobacco, decaying melons, and Jamaica rum. He said nothing, however, until he had quenched his thirst; then after a vigorous pull at a tall beaker, filled with a fragrant compound in which neither ice nor alcohol had been forgotten, observed, as if the subject still occupied his thoughts—

"I knows the trim on 'em, I tell ye; I knows the trim on 'em. As I says to the young chap now, I never found one yet as would steer kind in a sea-way."

Meanwhile, Célandine, moved by an impulse for

which she could not account, or perhaps dreading to analyse a sentiment that might after all be founded on a fallacy, led the young seaman into a cool, quiet room in a wooden house, on the shady side of the street, of which the apparent mistress was a large bustling negress, with a numerous family of jet-black children, swarming and crawling about the floor like garden-snails after a shower. This proprietress seemed to hold the Quadroon in considerable awe, and was delighted to bring the best her house afforded for the entertainment of such visitors. Slap-Jack, accommodated with a deep measure of iced rum-and-water, lit his pipe, played with the children, stared at his black hostess in unmitigated astonishment, and prepared himself to answer the questions it was obvious the Quadroon was burning to put.

Célandine hovered restlessly about the room, fixing her bright black eyes upon the seaman with an eager, inquiring glance, that she withdrew hastily when she thought herself observed, and thereby driving into a state of abject terror the large sable hostess, whose pity for the victim, as she believed him, at last overcame her fear of the Quadroon, and impelled her to whisper in Slap-Jack's ear—

“Obi-woman! *bruxa*,* buckra-massa, *bruxa*! *Mefiez-vous!*—*Ojo-malo*.† No drinkee for drunkee! Look out! *Gare!*” A warning utterly incomprehensible to its object, who winked at her calmly over his tumbler, while he drank with exceeding relish the friendly mother’s health, and that of her thriving black progeny.

There is nothing like a woman’s tact to wind the secrets out of a man’s bosom, gradually, insensibly, and by much the same smooth, delicate process as the spinning of flax off a distaff. With a few observations rather than questions, a few allusions artfully put, Célandine drew from Slap-Jack an account of his early years, and an explanation, offered with a certain pride, of the manner in which he became a seaman. When he told her how he had made his escape while a mere child from his protector, whom he described as “the chap wot wanted to bind him ’prentice to a saw-bones,” he was startled to see the Quadroon’s shining black eyes full of tears. He consoled her in his own rough, good-humoured way.

“What odds did it make after all,” argued Slap-Jack, helping himself liberally to the rum-and-water, “when I was out of my bed by

* A witch.

† Evil eye.

sunrise and down to the waterside to get aboardship in the British Channel, hours afore he was up, and so Westward-ho! and away? Don't ye take on about it. A sailor I *would* be, and a sailor I *am*. You ask the skipper if I'm not. He knows my rating I should think, and whether I'm worth *my* salt or no. Don't ye take on so, mother, I say!"

But the Quadroon was weeping without concealment now.

"Call me that again!" she exclaimed, sobbing convulsively. "Call me that again! I have not been called mother for so long. Hush!" she added, starting up, and laying her hand forcibly on his lips. "Not another word. Fool! Idiot that I am! Not another word. She can hear us. She can understand;" and Célandine darted a furious glance at the busy negress, which caused that poor woman to shake like a jelly down to her misshapen black heels.

Slap-Jack felt considerably puzzled. His private opinion, as he afterwards confided to his messmates, was, that the old lady not being drunk, must be mad—a cheerful view, which was indeed confirmed by what occurred immediately afterwards.

In struggling to keep her hand upon his mouth, she had turned back the deep, open collar of his blue shirt till his brawny neck was exposed nearly to the shoulder. Espying on that neck a certain white mark, contrasting with the ruddy weather-browed skin, she gave a half-stifled shriek, like that with which a dumb animal expresses its rapture of recognition ; and taking the man's head in her arms, pressed it to her bosom, rocking herself to and fro, while she wept and murmured over him with an inexplicable tenderness, by which he was at once astonished and alarmed.

For a few moments, and while the negress's back was turned, she held him tight, but released him when the other re-entered the room, exacting from him a solemn promise that he would meet her again at an indicated place, and adding that she would then confide to him matters in which, like herself, he was deeply interested, but which must be kept religiously secret so long as he remained in the island.

Slap-Jack, after he had finished his rum-and-water, rejoined his comrades, a more thoughtful man than he had left them. To their jests and inquiries he returned vague and inconclusive answers, causing Bottle-Jack to stare at him in solemn wonder, and affording Smoke-Jack another

illustration of his theory as to the wilfulness of feminine steerage in a sea-way.

Célandine, on the contrary, walked through the town with the jaunty step and bright vigilant eye of one who has discovered some treasure that must be guarded with a care proportioned to its value. She bought no more trinkets from the store-keepers now, she loitered no more to gossip with sallow white, or shining negro, or dandy coloured-man. At intervals her brow indeed clouded over, and the scowl of which it was so capable deepened ominously, while she clenched her hands and set her teeth; but the frown soon cleared away, and she smiled bright and comely once more.

She had found her boy at last. Her first-born, the image of her first love. Her heart warmed to him from the very moment he came near her at the store. She was sure of it long before she recognized the mark on his neck—the same white mark she had kissed a thousand times, when he danced and crowed on her knees. It was joy, it was triumph. But she must be very silent, very cautious. If it was hard that a mother might not openly claim her son, it would be harder still that such acknowledgment should rivet on him the yoke of a slavery to which he was born by that mother, herself a slave.



CHAPTER X.

MONTMIRAIL WEST.



AT a distance of less than a league from Port Welcome stood the large and flourishing plantation of *Cash-a-crou*, known to the European population, and, indeed, to many of the negroes, by the more civilized appellation of Montmirail West. It was the richest and most important establishment on the island, covering a large extent of cultivation, reclaimed at no small cost of labour from the bush, and worked by a numerous gang of slaves. Not a negro was purchased for these grounds till he had undergone a close inspection by the shrewd and pitiless overseer, who never missed a good investment, be it Coromantee, Guinea-man, or Congo, and never bought a hand, of however plausible an

appearance, in whom his quick eye could detect a flaw; consequently, no such cheerful faces, fresh lips, sound teeth, strong necks, open chests, sinewy arms, dry, large hands, flat stomachs, powerful loins, round thighs, muscular calves, lean ankles, high feet, and similar physical points of servile symmetry, were to be found in any other gang as in that which worked the wide clearings on the *Cash-a-crou* estate, which, for convenience, we will call by its more civilized name. It was said, however, that in the purchase of female negroes this overseer was not so particular; that a saucy eye, a nimble tongue, and such an amount of good looks as is compatible with African colouring and features, found more favour in his judgment than size, strength, substance, vigorous health, or the prolific qualities so desirable in these investments. The overseer, indeed, was a married man, living, it was thought, in wholesome dread of his Quadroon wife, and so completely did he identify himself with the new character he had assumed, that even Célandine could hardly believe her present husband was the same Stefano Bartoletti who had wooed her unsuccessfully in her girlhood, had met her again under such strange circumstances in France, eventually to follow her fortunes and those of her

mistress, the Marquise, and obtain from the latter the supervision of her negroes on the estate she had inherited by her mother's will, which she chose to call Montmirail West.

Bartoletti had intended to settle down for the rest of his life in a state of dignified indolence with Célandine. He had even offered to purchase the Quadroon's freedom, which was generously given to her by the Marquise with that view, but he had accustomed himself through the whole of his early life to the engrossing occupation of money-making, and like many others he found it impossible to leave off. He and his wife now devoted themselves entirely to the acquisition of wealth; she with the object of discovering her long-lost son, he, partly from inborn covetousness, and yet more from the force of habit. Quick, shrewd, and indeed enterprising, where there was no personal risk, he had been but a short time in the service of the Marquise ere he became an excellent overseer, by no means neglecting her interests, while he was scrupulously attentive to his own. The large dealings in human merchandize which now occupied his attention afforded scope for his peculiar qualities, and Signor Bartoletti found few competitors in the slave-market

who, in caution, cupidity, and knowledge of business, could pretend to be his equals. Moreover, he dearly loved the constant speculation, amounting to actual gambling, inseparable from such transactions, nor was he averse, besides, to that pleasing sensation of superiority experienced by all but the noblest natures from absolute authority, however unjustifiable, over their fellow-creatures.

The Signor was a great man in the plantation, a great man in Port Welcome, a great man on the deck of a trader just arrived with her swarthy cargo from the Bight of Benin or the Gold Coast; but his proportions seemed to shrink and his step to falter when he crossed the threshold of his own home. The older negroes who knew he had married an Obi-woman, and respected him for his daring, were persuaded that he had been quelled and brought into subjection through some charm put upon him by Célandine. To the same magical influence they attributed the Quadroon's favour with her mistress, and this superstitious dread had indeed been of service to both; for a strong feeling of dissatisfaction was gaining ground rapidly amongst the blacks, and then, as now, notwithstanding all that has been said and written in their

favour, they were less easily ruled by love than fear.

It is not that they are naturally savage, inhuman, brutal. Centuries of Christianity and cultivation might probably have done for the black man what they have done for the white; but those centuries have been denied him; and if he is to be taken at once from a state of utter ignorance and degradation to be placed on a footing of social equality with those who have hitherto been his masters—a race that has passed gradually through the successive stages he is expected to compass in one stride—surely it must be necessary to restrain him from the excesses peculiar to the lusty adolescence of nations, as of individuals, by some stronger repressive influence than need be applied to the staid and sober demeanour of a people arrived long ago at maturity, if not already past their prime.

Signor Bartoletti did not trouble himself with such speculations. Intimidation he found answered his purpose tolerably, corporal punishment extremely well.

Passing from the supervision of some five-score hoes, picking their labour out with great deliberation amongst the clefts and ridges of a half-

cleared mountain, clothed to its summit in a tangle of luxuriant beauty, he threaded a line of wattled mud cottages, cool with thick heavy thatch, dazzling in whitewash, and interspersed with fragrant almond-trees, breaking the scorching sunlight into a thousand shimmering rays, as they rustled and quivered to the whisper of the land-breeze, not yet exhausted by the heat.

At the door of one of these huts he spied a comely negro girl, whose duties should have kept her in the kitchen of the great house. He also observed that she concealed something bulky under her snowy apron, and looked stealthily about as if afraid of being seen.

He had a step noiseless and sure as a cat; she never heard him coming, but started with a loud scream when she felt his hand on her shoulder, and incontinently began to cry.

"What have you got there, Fleurette?" asked the overseer, sternly. "Bring it out at once, and show it up!"

"Nothing, Massa," answered Fleurette, of course, though she was sobbing all the time. "It only Aunt Rosalie's piccaninny. I take him in please, just now, to his mammy, out of the wind."

There was but such a light breath of air as kept the temperature below actual suffocation.

“Wind ! nonsense !” exclaimed Bartoletti, perspiring and exasperated. “Aunt Rosalie’s child was in the baby-yard half an hour ago ; here, let me look at him !” and the overseer snatched up Fleurette’s apron to discover a pair of plump black hands, clasped over a well-fattened turkey, cleaned, plucked, and ready for the pot.

The girl laughed through her tears. “You funny man, Signor !” said she archly, yet with a gleam of alarm in her wild black eyes ; “you no believe only when you see. Piccaninny gone in wash-tub long since ; Fleurette talkee trash, trash ; dis lilly turkey fed on plantation at Maria Galante ; good father give um to Fleurette a-cause dis nigger say ‘Ave’ right through, and spit so at Mumbo-Jumbo.”

This story was less credible than the last, inasmuch as the adjoining plantation of Maria Galante, cultivated by a few Jesuit priests, although in a thriving condition and capable of producing the finest poultry reared, was more than an hour’s walk from where they stood, and it was impossible that Fleurette could have been absent so long from her duties at that period of the day. So Bartoletti,

placing his hand in his waistcoat, pulled out a certain roll, which the slaves called his "black book," and inserted Fleurette's name therein for corporal punishment to the amount of stripes awarded for the crime of theft.

It was a common action enough ; scarce a day passed, scarce even an hour, without the production of this black book by the overseer, and a torrent of entreaties, couched in the mingled jargon of French, Spanish, and British, I have endeavoured to render through the conventional negro-English, which indeed formed its basis, from the unfortunate culprit whose name was thus inscribed ; but on this occasion Fleurette seemed to entertain a morbid terror of the ordeal quite out of proportion to its frequency, and, indeed, its severity—for though sufficiently brutal, the lash was not dangerous to life or limb. She screamed, she wept, she prayed, she caught the overseer by his knees and clasped them to her bosom, entreating him, with a frantic earnestness that became almost sublime, to spare her this degradation ! to forgive her only this once ! to bid her work night and day till crop-time, and then to send her into the field-gang for the hardest labour they could devise—nay, to sell her to the first trader that touched at Port Welcome never to

look on her home at *Cash-a-crou* again—anything, anything, rather than tie her to a stake and flog her like a disobedient hound!

But Bartoletti was far too practised an overseer to be in the slightest degree moved by such entreaties. Replacing the black book in his waistcoat, he walked coolly away, without deigning to look back at his despairing suppliant, writhing under such a mixture of grief and shame as soon maddened into rage. Perhaps, had he done so, he would have been frightened into mercy, for a bolder man than the Italian might have been cowed by the glare of that girl's eyes, when she drew up her slender figure, and clenching her hands till the nails pierced them, spat after him with an intensity of hatred that wanted only opportunity to slake its fierce desire in blood.

The Signor, however, wiping his brow, unconscious, passed quietly on, to report his morning's work to the Marquise, and obtain her sanction for Fleurette's punishment, because the mistress never permitted any slave on her estate to be chastised but by her own express command.

Long years ago, when his heart was fresh and high, the Italian had spent a few months in this very island, a period to which he still looked back

as to the one bright ray that gilded his dreary, wandering, selfish life. It was here he met Célandine while both were young, and wooed her with little encouragement indeed, for she confessed honestly enough that he was too late, yet not entirely without hope. And now in gleams between the cane-pieces he could catch a glimpse of that silver-spread lagoon by which they had walked more than once in the glowing evenings, till darkness, closing without warning like a curtain, found them together still.

He had conceived for himself then an ideal of Paradise which had never in after years faded completely away. To win the Quadroon for his own—to make himself a peaceful home in easy circumstances, somewhere amidst this tangled wilderness of beauty from which Port Welcome peeped out on the Caribbean Sea—to sit in his own porch and watch the tropical sunset dying off through its blended hues of gold, and crimson, and orange, into the pale, serene depths of opal, lost ere he could look again, amongst the gathering shades of night—such were his dreams, and at last he had realized them to the letter; but he never watched the sunset now, nor walked by the cool glistening lagoon with the woman whom in his own selfish way he had loved

for half a lifetime. She was his wife, you see, and a very imperious wife she proved. When he had leisure to speculate on such matters, which was seldom, he could not but allow that he was disappointed; that the ideal was a fallacy, the romance a fiction, the investment a failure; practically, the home was dull, the lagoon damp, and the sunset moonshine!

Therefore, as he walked on, though the material Paradise was there, as it had always been, he never wasted a look or thought on its glowing beauties, intent only on the dust that covered his shoes, the thirst that fired his throat, and the perspiration that streamed from his brow. Yet palm, cocoa, orange, and lime tree were waving overhead; while the wild vine, pink, purple, and delicate creamy-white, winding here about his path, ran fifty feet aloft round some bare stem to which it clung in a succession of convolvulus-like blossoms from the same plant he trod beneath his very feet. Birds of gaudy feather—purple, green, and flaming scarlet, flashed from tree to tree with harsh, discordant cries, and a *Louis d'or* flitted round him in its bright, golden plumage, looking, as its name implies, like a guinea upon wings.

The grass-grown road he followed was indeed an

avenue to the great house, and as he neared his destination he passed another glimpse of tropical scenery without a glance. It was the same view that delighted the eyes of the Marquise daily from her sitting-room, and that Cerise would look at in quiet enjoyment for hours.

A slope of vivid green, dotted with almond-trees, stretched away from the long, low, white building to a broad, clear river, shining between the plantains and bananas that clothed its banks; beyond these, cattle pasture and cane-pieces shot upward in variegated stripes through the tangled jungle of the steep ascent, while at short intervals hog-plum, or other tall trees of the forest, reared their heads against the cloudless sky, to break the dark thick mass that clothed the mountain to its very summit—save where some open, natural savannah, with its crop of tall, rank, feathering grass, relieved the eye from the vivid colouring and gaudy exuberance of beauty in which nature dresses these West Indian slands.

Bartoletti knew well that he should find the Marquise in her sitting-room, for the sun was still high and the heat intense; none therefore but slaves, slave-drivers, or overseers would be abroad for hours. The Signor had however been reduced

to such proper subjection by Célandine that he never ventured to approach the Marquise without making a previous report to his wife, and as the Quadroon had not yet returned from the visit to Port Welcome, in which she made acquaintance with Slap-Jack, some considerable delay took place before the enormity of Fleurette's peculations could be communicated to her mistress.

Mother and daughter were inseparable here, in the glowing tropical heat, as under the cool breezes and smiling skies of their own beautiful France, a land to which they constantly reverted with a longing that seemed only to grow more and more intense as every hour of their unwelcome banishment dragged by.

They were sitting in a large low room, with the smallest possible amount of furniture and the greatest attainable of air. To insure a thorough draught, the apartment occupied the whole breadth of the house, and the windows, scarcely closed from year's-end to year's-end, were placed opposite each other, so that there was free ingress on all sides for the breeze that, notwithstanding the burning heat of the climate, blows pretty regularly in these islands from morning till night and from night till morning. It wafted through the whole

apartment the fragrance of a large granadilla, cut in half for the purpose, that stood surrounded by a few shaddocks, limes, and pomegranates, heaped together like a cornucopia on a small table in the corner; it fluttered the leaves of a book that lay on Mademoiselle de Montmirail's knee, who was pretending to read with her eyes resting wearily on a streak of blue sea, far off between the mountains, and it lifted the dark hair from the temples of the Marquise, fanning with grateful breath, yet scarce cooling, the rich crimson of her cheek.

The resemblance between these two grew closer day by day. While the mother remained stationary at that point of womanly beauty to which the daughter was approaching, figure and face, in each, became more and more alike; and though the type of the elder was still the richer and more glowing, of the younger, the more delicate and classical, Cerise seemed unaccountably to have gained some of that spirit and vitality which the Marquise seemed as unaccountably to have lost.

Also on the countenance of each might be traced the same expression, the longing, wistful look of those who live in some world of their own, out of and far beyond the present, saddened in the

woman's face with memory as it was brightened in the girl's by hope.

"It is suffocating!" exclaimed the former, rising restlessly from her seat, and pushing the hair off her temples with a gesture of impatience. "Cerise, my darling, are you made of stone that you do not cry out at this insupportable heat? It irritates me to see you sit reading there as calmly as if you could feel the wind blowing off the heights of Montmartre in January. It seems as if the sun would never go down in this oven that they call an island."

Cerise shut her book and collected her scattered ideas with an obvious effort. "I read, mamma," she answered smiling, "because it is less fatiguing than to think, but I obtain as little result from the one process as the other. Do you know, I begin to believe the stories we used to hear in Paris about the West Indies, and I am persuaded that we shall not only be shrivelled up to mummies in a few more weeks, but that our tongues will be so dry and cracked as to be incapable of expressing our thoughts, even if our poor addled brains could form them. Look at Pierrot even, who is a native; he has not said a syllable since breakfast."

Pierrot however, like the historical parrot of all

ages, though silent on the present occasion, doubtless *thought* the more, for the attitude in which he held his head on one side, peering at his young mistress with shrewd unwinking eye, implied perceptions more than human, nay, even diabolical in their malignant sagacity.

“What can I do?” said the Marquise vehemently, pacing the long room with quick steps ill suited to the temperature and the occasion. “While the Regent lives I can never return to Paris. For myself, I sometimes fancy I could risk it; but when I think of you, Cerise—I dare not—I *dare* not; that’s the truth. An insult, an injury, he might forgive, or at least forget; but a scene in which he enacted the part of the *Pantaleone*, whom everybody kicks and cuffs; in which he was discovered as a coxcomb, an intruder, and a *polisson*, and through the whole of which he is conscious, moreover, that he was intensely ridiculous—I protest to you I cannot conceive any outrage so horrible as to satisfy his revenge. No, my child, for generations my family have served the Bourbons, and we should know what they are: with all their good qualities there are certain offences they can never forgive, and this Regent is the worst of the line.”

“Then, mamma,” observed Cerise cheerfully, though she smothered a sigh, “we must have patience and live where we are. It might be worse,” she added, pointing to the streak of deep-blue sea that belted the horizon. “This is a wider view and a fairer than the dead wall of Vincennes or the gratings of the Bastile, and some day, perhaps, some of our friends from France may drop in quite unexpectedly to offer their homage to Madame la Marquise. How the dear old Prince-Marshal would gasp in this climate, and how dreadfully he would swear at the lizards, centipedes, galley-wasps, red ants, and cockroaches! He who, brave as he is, never dared face a spider or an earwig! Mamma, I think if I could see his face over a borer-worm, I should have one more good laugh, even in such a heat as this.”

“You might laugh, my dear,” answered her mother, “but I think I should be more inclined to cry—yes, to cry for sheer joy at seeing him again. I grant you he was a little ridiculous; but what courage! what sincerity! what a true gentleman! I hear that he too is out of favour at the Palais Royal, and has returned to his estates at Chateau-Guerrand. His coach was seen near the Hôtel Montmirail the night of Monsieur le Duc’s

creditable *escapade*, and that is crime enough, I conclude, to balance a dozen battles and forty years of loyal service to the throne. No, Cerise, I tell you while the monster lives we must remain exiled in this purgatory of fire. But my friends keep me well informed of passing events. I hear his health is failing. They tell me his face is purple now in the mornings when he comes to Council, and he drinks harder than ever with his *roués* at night. Of course, my child, it would be wicked to wish for the death of a fellow-creature, but while there is a Regent in France you and I must be content with the lizards and the cockroaches for society, and for amusement, the supervision of these miserable, brutalized negro slaves."

"Poor things!" said the younger lady tenderly. "I am sure they have kind hearts under their black skins. I cannot but think that if they were taught and encouraged, and treated less like beasts of burden, they would show as much intelligence as our own peasants at La Fierté or the *real* Montmirail. Why, Fleurette brought me a bouquet of jessamines and tuberoses yesterday, with a compliment to the paleness of my complexion that could not have been outdone by Count Point d'Appui himself. Oh! mamma, I wish you would let me

establish *my* civil code for the municipal government of the blacks."

"You had better let it alone, my child," answered the Marquise gravely. "Wiser brains than yours have puzzled over the problem, and failed to solve it. I have obtained all the information in my power from those whose experience is reliable, and considered it for myself besides, till my head ached. It seems to me that young colonists, and all who know nothing about negroes, are for encouragement and indulgence; old planters, and those who are well acquainted with their nature, for severity and repression. I would not be cruel; far from it. But as for treating them like white people, Cerise, in my opinion all such liberality is sheer nonsense. Jaques and Pierre, at home, are ill-fed, ill-clothed (I wish it were not so), up early, down late, and working often without intermission from sunrise till sunset; nevertheless, Jaques or Pierre will doff his red cap, tuck up his blouse, and run a league bareheaded, after a hard day's work, if you or I lift up a finger; and why?—because we are La Fiertés or Montmirails. But Hippolyte or Achille, fat, strong, lazy, well-fed, grumbles if he is bid to carry a message to the boiling-house after his eight hours' labour, and only

obeys because he knows that Bartoletti can order him a hundred lashes by my authority at his discretion."

"I do not like the Italian, mamma! I am sure that man is not to be trusted," observed Cerise in consequence, being a young lady. "What could make my dear old *bonne* marry him, I have never been able to discover. He is an alchemist, you know, and a conjuror, and worse. I shudder to think of the stories they told about him at home, and I believe he bewitched her!"

Here Mademoiselle de Montmirail crossed herself devoutly, and her mother laughed.

"He is a very good overseer," said she, "and as for his necromancy, even if he learned it from the Prince of Darkness, which you seem to believe, I fancy Célandine would prove a match for his master. Between them, the Signor, as he calls himself, and his wife, manage my people wonderfully well, and this is no easy matter at present, for I am sorry to say they show a good deal of insubordination and ill-will. There is a spirit of disaffection amongst them," added the Marquise, setting her red lips firmly together, "that must be kept down with the strong hand. I do not mind your going about amongst the house negroes,

Cerise, or noticing the little children, though taking anything black on your lap is, in my opinion, an injudicious piece of condescension; but I would not have you be seen near the field-gang at present, men or women, and above all, never trust them. Not one is to be depended on except Célandine, for I believe they hate her as much as her husband, and fear her a great deal more."

The Marquise had indeed cause for uneasiness as to the condition of her plantation, although she had never before hinted so much to her daughter, and indeed, like the generality of people who live on the crust of a volcano, she forced herself to ignore the danger of which she was yet uncomfortably conscious. For some time, perhaps ever since the arrival of the Italian overseer, there had been symptoms of discontent and disaffection among the slaves. The work indeed went on as usual, for Bartoletti was unsparing of the lash, but scarce a week passed without a runaway betaking himself to the bush, and vague threats, fore-runners of some serious outbreak, had been heard from the idlest and most mutinous of the gang when under punishment. It would not have been well in such difficulties to relax the bonds of

discipline, yet it was scarcely wise to draw them tighter than before. The Marquise, however, came of a race that had never yet learned to yield, and to which, for generations, the assertion of his rights by an inferior had seemed an intolerable presumption that must be resisted to the death. As her slaves, therefore, grew more defiant, she became more severe, and of late the slightest offences had been visited with the utmost rigour, and under no circumstances passed over without punishment. It was an unfortunate time therefore that poor Fleurette had chosen to be detected in the abstraction of a turkey ready plucked for cooking, and she could not have fallen into worse hands than those of the pitiless Italian overseer.

The Marquise had scarce concluded her warning, ere Bartoletti entered the sitting-room with his daily report. His manner was extremely obsequious to Madame de Montmirail, and polite beyond expression to mademoiselle. The former scarcely noticed his demeanour at any time; the latter observed him narrowly, with the air of a child who watches a toad or any such object for which it feels an unaccountable dislike.

Cerise usually left the room soon after the Signor entered it, but something in her mother's

face on the present occasion, as she ran her eye over the black book, induced her to remain.

The Marquise read the punishment list twice; frowned, hesitated, and looked discomposed.

"It is her first offence?" said she, inquiringly. "And the girl is generally active and well-behaved enough."

"Pardon, Madame la Marquise," answered Bartoletti. "Madame forgave her only last week when she lost half a dozen of mademoiselle's handkerchiefs, that she had taken to wash; or *said* she lost them," he added pointedly.

"Oh! mamma!" interposed Cerise, but the Marquise checked her with a sign, and Bartoletti proceeded.

"One of her brothers is at the head of a gang of *Maroons*,* who infest the very mountains above our cane-pieces, and another ran away to join him last week. They say at the plantation we *dare* not punish any of the family, and I am pledged to make an example of the first that comes into my hands."

"Very well," said the Marquise, decidedly, returning his black book to her overseer, and

* Runaway negroes who join in bands and live by plunder in the woods.

observing to Cerise, who was by this time in tears,
“ A case, my dear, that it would be most injudicious to pardon. After all, the pain is not much, and the disgrace, you know, to this sort of people is nothing !”



CHAPTER XI.

BLACK, BUT COMELY.

TRANSPLANTED like some delicate flower from her native soil to this glowing West-Indian island, Mademoiselle de Montmirail had lost but little of the freshness that bloomed in the Norman convent, and had gained a more decided colouring and a deeper expression, which added the one womanly grace hitherto wanting in her beauty. Even the negroes, chattering to one another as they hoed between the cane-rows, grinned out their approval of her beauty, and Hippolyte, a gigantic and hideous Coromantee, imported from Africa, had been good enough to express his opinion that she only wanted a little more colour, as he called it, meaning a shade of yellow in her skin, to be

handsome enough for his wife; whereat his audience shouted and showed their white teeth, wagging their woolly heads applauding, while the savage shook his great black shoulders, and looked as if he thought more unlikely events might come to pass.

Had it not been for these very slaves, who gave their opinions so freely on her personal appearance, Cerise would have been tolerably happy. She was, indeed, far from the scenes that were most endeared to her by memory and association. She was very uncertain when or how she should return to France, and until she returned, there was apparently no hope, however remote, that she could realize a certain dream which now constituted the charm of her whole life. Still the dream had been dreamed, vague, romantic, wild, and visionary; yet the girl dwelt upon it day by day, with a tenderness and a constancy the deeper and the more enduring that they seemed so hopeless and so thrown away.

I would not have it supposed, however, that Mademoiselle de Montmirail was a foolish love-sick maiden, who allowed her fancies to become the daily business of her life. On the contrary, she went through her duties scrupulously, making

for herself occupation where she did not find it, helping her mother, working, reading, playing, improving her mind, and doing all she could for the negroes on the estate, but tinging everything unconsciously, whether of joy or sorrow, trouble or pleasure, with the rosy light of a love she had conceived without reason, cherished without reflection, and now brooded over without hope, in the depths of her own heart.

But although the welfare of the slaves afforded her continual occupation, and probably prevented her becoming utterly wearied and overpowered by the sameness of her daily life, their wilfulness, their obstinacy, their petulant opposition to every experiment she was disposed to try for their moral and physical benefit, occasioned her many an hour of vexation and depression. Above all, the frequency of corporal punishment, a necessity of which she was dimly conscious, but would by no means permit herself to acknowledge, cut her to the heart. Silently and earnestly she would think over the problem, to leave it unsolved at last, because she could not but admit that the dictates of her feelings were opposed to the conclusions of her reason. Then she would wish she had absolute power on the plantation, would form vague

schemes for the enlightenment of their own people and the enfranchisement of every negro as he landed, till, having once entered on the region of romance, she would pursue her journey to its usual termination, and see herself making the happiness of every one about her, none the less earnestly that the desire of her own heart was granted, her schemes, her labours, all her thoughts and feelings shared by the Grey Musketeer, whom yet it seemed so improbable she was ever to see again.

It wanted an hour of sunset. The evening breeze had set in with a refreshing breath that fluttered the skirt of her white muslin dress and the pink ribbons on her wide straw hat, as Mademoiselle de Montmirail strolled towards the negro-houses, carrying a *tisane* she had herself prepared for Aunt Rosalie's sick child. The slaves were already trooping down from the cane-pieces, laughing, jesting, singing, carrying their tools over their shoulders and their baskets or calabashes on their heads. A fat little negro of some eight years old, who reminded Cerise of certain bronze casts that held wax-lights in the Hôtel Montmirail, and who was indeed little less sparingly clad than those works of art, came running by, his saucy features shining with a merry excitement, in such

haste that he could only pull himself up to make her a droll little reverence when he was almost under her feet. She recognized him as an elder brother of the very infant she was about to visit, and asked if baby was any better, but the child seemed so intent on some proceeding of his own that she could not extort an answer.

“What is it, Hercule?” said she, laying her white hand on the little knotted woolly head. “Where are you off to in such a hurry? Is it a dance at the negro-houses, or a merry-making in the Square?”

The Square was a clear space, outside the huts of the field negroes, devoted to occasions of unusual display, and Hercule’s thoughts were as obviously turned in that direction as his corpulent little person.

“Better bobbery nor dance,” answered the imp, looking up earnestly in her face. “M’amselle Fleurette tied safe to howling-tree! Massa Hippolyte, him tall black nigger, floggee criss-cross. So! Make dis good little nigger laugh, why for, I go see!” and away scampered Hercule as fast as his short legs would carry him, followed by Cerise, who felt her cheek paling and her blood tingling to her fingers’-ends.

But Aunt Rosalie's baby never got the *tisane*, for Mademoiselle de Montmirail spilt it all as she hurried on.

Coming beyond the rows of negro-houses, she found a large assemblage of slaves, both men and women, ranged in a circle, many of the latter being seated on the ground, with their children crawling about their feet, while the fathers looked over the heads of their families, grinning in curiosity and delight.

They were all eager to enjoy one of those spectacles to which the Square, as they chose to call it, was especially devoted.

In the centre of this open space, with the saffron light of a setting sun full upon her closed eyes and contracted features, cowered poor Fleurette, naked to the waist, secured hand and foot to a strong upright post which prevented her from falling, with her wrists tied together and drawn to a level somewhat higher than her head, so that she was unable even to contract her shoulders for protection from the lash. Though her shapely dark form and bosom were thus exposed, she seemed to feel less shame than fear; but the reason was now obvious why she had shrunk with such unusual terror from her odious and degrading punishment.

Looking on with callous indifference, and holding his black book in his hand, stood Bartoletti, austereiy satisfied with this public recognition of his authority, but little interested in the result, save as it affected the length of time, more or less, during which the victim would be incapacitated from service.

Behind the girl, and careful to remain at such a distance as allowed room for the sweep of his right arm, was stationed the most hideous figure in the scene: a tall powerful Coromantee negro, African-born, with all his savage propensities intensified by food, servitude, and the love of rum. He brandished a long-lashed, knotted whip in his broad hand, and eyeing the pliant shrinking figure before him, grinned like a demon in sheer desire of blood.

He was to take his cue from the overseer. At the moment Cerise rounded the last of the negro-houses and came into full view of this revolting spectacle, Bartoletti's harsh Italian voice grated on the silence—"One!"

Hippolyte, such was the Coromantee's inappropriate name, drew himself back, raised his brawny arm, and the lash fell with a dull jerk, deadened by the flesh into which it cut.

There was a faint moan, and the poor back quivered in helpless agony.

Cerise, in her white dress, burst through the sable circle like a flash.

"Two!" grated that harsh voice, and again the cruel lash came down, but it was dripping now with blood, and a long wailing shriek arose that would not be suppressed.

"*Halte là!*" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montmirail, standing in the midst, pale, trembling, dilated, and with fire flashing from her blue eyes. "Take that girl down! this instant! I command it! Let me see who will dare to disobey!"

Even Hippolyte shrunk back, like some grotesque fiend rebuked. Bartoletti strove to expostulate, but somehow he was awed by the beauty of that holy wrath, so young, so fair, so terrible, and he dared not lift his eyes to meet those scorching looks. He cowered, he trembled, he signed to two negro women to obey mademoiselle, and then slunk doggedly away.

Cerise passed her arm caressingly round Fleurette's neck, she wiped the poor torn shoulders with her own laced handkerchief, she rested the dark woolly head on her bosom, and lifting

the slave's face to her own, kissed her, once, twice, tenderly and pitifully on the lips.

Then Fleurette's tears gushed out : she sank to her young mistress's knees, she grovelled at her very feet, she kissed them, she hugged them, she pressed them to her eyes and mouth ; she vowed, she sobbed, she protested, and, at least while her passion of gratitude and affection lasted, she spoke no more than the truth when she declared that she asked no better than to consecrate every drop of blood in her body, her life, her heart, her soul, to the service of Mademoiselle de Montmirail.



CHAPTER XII.

A WISE CHILD.



THE 'Bashful Maid' was still lying peacefully at anchor in the harbour of Port Welcome, yards squared, sails furled, decks polished to a dazzling white, every article of gear and tackle denoting profound repose, even the very pennon from her truck drooping motionless in the heat. Captain George spent much of his time below, making up his accounts, with the invaluable assistance of Beaudésir, who, having landed soon after their arrival, remained an hour or two in the town, and returned to the brigantine, expressing no desire for further communication with the shore.

George himself postponed his visit to the island until he had completed the task on which he was

engaged. In the meantime he gave plenty of liberty to the crew, an indulgence of which none availed themselves more freely than Slap-Jack and his two friends.

These last indeed seldom stirred beyond the town. Here they found all they wanted in the shape of luxury or amusement: strong tobacco, new rum, an occasional scrape of a fiddle with a thrumming accompaniment on the banjo, nothing to do, plenty to drink, and a large room to smoke in.

But the foretop-man was not so easily satisfied. Much to the disgust of his comrades, he seemed to weary of their society, to have lost his relish for fiery drinks and sea stories; nay, to have acquired diverse tastes and habits, foreign to his nature and derogatory to his profession.

"Gone cruisin' thereaway," observed Bottle-Jack, vaguely waving his pipe in the direction of the mountains. "Never taken no soundings, nor kept no dead reckoning, nor signalled for a pilot, but just up foresail, drive-a-head, stem on, happy-go-lucky, an' who cares!" While Smoke-Jack, puffing out solemn clouds of fragrant Trinidado, enunciated sententiously that he "Warn't a goin' to dispute but what every craft should hoist her own ensign an' lay her own course; but when he see a able

seaman clearing out from such a berth as this here, leaving the stiffest of grog and the strongest of 'bacca' a-cause of a old yaller woman with a red burgee, why, *he* knowed the trim on 'em, that was *where* it was. See if it wasn't. Here's my service to you, mate—All ships at sea!"

Long ere the two stanch friends, however, had arrived at this intelligible conclusion, the object of their anxiety was half-way up the mountain, in fulfilment of the promise he had made Célandine to meet her at an appointed place.

In justice to Slap-Jack, it is but fair to admit that his sentiments in regard to the Quadroon were those of keen curiosity mingled with pity for the obvious agitation under which she seemed to labour in his presence. Fair Alice herself, far off in her humble home among the downs, need not have grudged the elder woman an hour of her young seaman's society, although every minute of it seemed so strangely prized by this wild, energetic, and mysterious person, with her swarthy face, her scarlet head-dress, and her flashing eyes, gleaming with the fierce anxious tenderness of a leopardess separated from her whelps.

Slap-Jack's sea legs had hardly time to become fatigued, ere at a turn in the mountain-path he

found Célandine waiting for him, and somewhat to his disgust, peering about in every direction, as if loth to be observed ; a clandestine interpretation of their harmless meeting which roused the young seaman's ire, and against which he would have vehemently protested, had she not placed her hand over his mouth and implored him urgently, though in a whisper, to keep silence. Then she bade him follow, still below her breath, and so preceded him up the steep ascent with cautious, stealthy steps, but at a pace that made the foretop-man's unaccustomed knees shake and his breath come quick.

The sun was hot, the mountain high, the path overgrown with cactus and other prickly plants, tangled with creepers and not devoid of snakes. Monkeys chattered, parrots screamed, glittering insects quivered like tinsel in the sun, or darted like flashes of coloured light across the forest-shade. Vistas of beauty, such as he had never dreamed of, opened out on either side, and looking back more than once to take breath while he ascended, the deep blue sea lay spread out beneath him, rising broader and broader to meet the blue transparent sky.

But Slap-Jack, truth to tell, was sadly indifferent

to it all. Uneasiness of the legs sadly counteracted pleasure of the eye. It was with considerable gratification that he observed his leader diverge from the upward path, and rounding the shoulder of the hill, take a direction somewhat on the downward slope. Then he wiped his brows, with a sigh of relief, and asked audibly enough for something to drink.

She seemed less afraid of observation now, although she did not comply with his request, but pointed downward to a dark hollow, from which ascended a thin, white, spiral line of smoke, the only sign denoting human habitation in the midst of this luxuriant wilderness of tropical growth and fragrance. Then, parting the branches with both hands, she dived into the thicket, to stop at the door of a hut, so artfully concealed amongst the dense luxuriant foliage that a man might have passed within five yards and never known it was there but for the smoke.

Célandine closed the door cautiously behind her visitor, handed him a calabash of water, into which she poured some rum from a goodly stone jar—holding at least a gallon—watched him eagerly while he drank, and when he set the measure down, flung both arms round his neck, and kissing

him all over the eyes and face, murmured in fondest accents—

“Do you not know why I have brought you here? Do you not know who and what you are?”

“I could have told you half an hour back,” answered Slap-Jack, with a puzzled air, “but so many queer starts happen hereaway, mother, that I’m blessed if I can tell you now.”

Tears shone in the fierce black eyes that never left his face, but seemed to feast on its comeliness with the desire of a famished appetite for food.

“Call me mother again!” exclaimed the Quadroon. “You called me mother down yonder at the store, and my heart leaped to hear the word. Sit ye down, my darling, there in the light, where I can see your innocent face. How like you are to your father, my boy! You’ve got his own bold eyes, and broad shoulders, and large, strong hands. I could not be deceived. I knew you from the first. Tell me true; you guessed who I was. You would never have gone up to a stranger as you did to me!”

Slap-Jack looked completely mystified. Wisely reflecting, however, that if a woman be left uninterrupted she will never “belay,” as he subsequently observed, “till she has payed out the

whole of her yarn," he took another pull at the rum-and-water, and held his peace.

"Look about you, boy," continued Célandine, "and mark the wild, mysterious retreat I have made myself, on your account alone. No other white man has ever entered the Obi-woman's hut. Not a negro in the island but shakes with fear when he approaches that low doorway; not one but leaves a gift behind when he departs. And now, chance has done for the Obi-woman that which all her perseverance and all her cunning had failed to effect. Influence I have always had amongst the blacks, for I am of their kindred, and they believe that I possess supernatural powers. You need not smile, boy. I can sometimes foretell the future so far as it affects others, though blindly ignorant where it regards myself; just as a man reads his neighbour's face clearly, though he cannot see his own. All my influence I have devoted to the one great object of making money. For that, I left my sunny home to live years in the bleak, cold plains of France; for that, I sold myself in my old age to one whom I could not care for, even in my youth; for that, I have been tampering of late with the most desperate and dangerous characters in the island; and money I

only valued because, without it, I feared I could never find my boy. Listen, my darling, and learn how a mother's love outlives the fancy of youth, the devotion of womanhood, and the covetousness of old age. Look at me now, child. It is not so long since men have told me—even in France, where they profess to understand such matters—that I retained my attractions still. You may believe that thirty years ago the Quadroon of Cash-a-crou, as they called her, had suitors, lovers and admirers by the score. Somehow, I laughed at them all. It seemed to me that a man's affection for a girl only lasted while she despised him, and I resolved that no weakness of my own should ever bring me down a single step from the vantage-ground I held. Planters, overseers, councillors, judges, all were at my feet; not a white man in the island but would have given three months' pay for a smile from the yellow girl at Cash-a-crou; and the yellow girl—slave though she was—carried her head high above them all.

“Well, one bright morning, a week before crop-time, a fine large ship, twice the size of that brigantine in the harbour, came and dropped her anchor off the town. The same night her sailors gave a dance at one of the negro-houses in Port

Welcome. I never hear a banjo in the still, calm evenings but it thrills to my very marrow still, though it will be five-and-twenty long years, when the canes are cut, since I went into that dancing-room a haughty, wilful beauty, and came out a humble, love-stricken maid. Turn a bit more to the light, my boy, that I may look into your blue eyes; they shine like his, when he came across the floor and asked me to dance. I've heard the Frenchwomen say that it takes a long time for a man to win his way into a girl's heart. Theirs is a cold country, and they have no African blood in their veins. All I know is, that your father had not spoken half-a-dozen words ere I felt for him as I never felt for any creature on earth before. I'd have jumped off the Sulphur Mountain, and never thought twice about it, if he had asked me. When we walked home together in the moonlight—for he begged hard to see me safe to my own door, and you may think I wasn't very difficult to persuade—I told him honestly that I had never loved any man but him, and never would love another, come what might. He looked down into my eyes for a moment astonished, just as you look now, and then he smiled—no face ever I saw had such a smile as your father's—and wound his great strong

arm round my waist, and pressed me to his heart. I was happy then. If I might live over just one minute of my life again, it should be that first minute when I felt I belonged no more to myself, but to him.

“So we were married by an old Spanish priest in the little white chapel between the lighthouse and the town—yes, married right enough, my boy, never doubt it, though I was but a slave.

“I do not know how a great lady like our Marquise feels who can give herself and all her possessions, proudly and in public, to the man she loves, but she ought to be very happy. I was very happy, though I might only meet your father by stealth, and with the fear of a punishment I shuddered to think of before my eyes. I thought of it very often too, yet not without pride and pleasure, to risk it all for his sake. What I dreaded far worse than punishment—worse than death, was the day his ship would sail, and though she lay weeks and months refitting in the harbour, that day arrived too soon. Never tell me people die of grief, my boy, since I came off the hill alive when I had seen the last of those white sails. I could have cursed the ship for taking him away, and yet I blessed her for his sake.

“There was consolation for me too. I had his

solemn promise to come back again, and I'll never believe but he would have kept it had he been alive. Nothing shall persuade me that my brave, blue-eyed Englishman has not been sleeping many a long year, rolled in his hammock, under the deep, dark sea. It was well the conviction came on me by degrees that I was never to see him again. I should have gone mad if I had known it that last night when he bade me keep my heart up, and trust him to the end. After a while I fretted less, for my time was near, and my beautiful boy was born. Such an angel never lay on a mother's knees. My son, my son, you have the same eyes, and the same sweet smile still. I knew you that day in the street, long before I turned your collar down, and saw the little white mark like an anchor on your neck. How proud I was of you, and how I longed to show my sturdy, blue-eyed boy, who began to speak at eleven months, to every mother in the island, but I dared not—I dared not, for your sake more than for my own. I was cunning then—ay, cunning, and brave, and enduring as a panther. They never found me out—they never so much as suspected me. I had money, plenty of it, and influence too, with one man at least, who would have put his hand in the fire, coward as I think he is, if I had only made him a sign. With his help, I

concealed the existence of my boy from every creature on the plantation—black or white. In his house I used to come and nurse you, dear, and play with you by the hour together. That man is my husband now, and I think he deserves a better fate.

“At last he was forced to leave the island, and then came another parting, worse than the first. It was only for myself I grieved when I lost your father, but when I was forced to trust my beautiful boy to the care of another, to cross the sea, to sleep in strange beds, to be washed and dressed by other hands, perhaps to meet with hard words and angry looks, or worse still, to clasp his pretty arms about a nurse’s neck, and to forget the mother that bore him, I thought my heart would break. My boy, there is no such thing—I tell you again, these are fables—grief does not kill.

“For a long time I heard regularly of your welfare, and paid liberally for the good news. I was sure the man to whom I had intrusted you looked upon me as his future wife, and though I hated him for the thought, I—who loved that bold, strong, outspoken sailor—I permitted it, I encouraged it, for I believed it would make him kinder to my boy. When you were a little older, I meant to buy my

own freedom, and take you with me to live in Europe—wherever you could be safe.

“At last a ship sailed into Port Welcome, and brought no letter for me, no news of my child. Another, and yet another, till months of longing, sickening anxiety had grown to years, and I was nearly mad with fear and pain. The father I had long despaired of, but I thought I was never to be used so hardly as to lose the child.

“I tell you again, my boy, grief does not kill. I lived on, but I was a different creature now. My youth was gone, my beauty became terrible rather than attractive. I possessed certain powers that rendered me an object of dread more than love, and here, in this very hut, I devoted myself to the practice of Obi, and the study of that magic which has made the name of Célandine a word of fear to every negro in the island.

“One only aim, one only hope, kept me from going mad. Money I was resolved to possess, the more the better, for by the help of money alone, I thought, could I ever gain tidings of my boy. The slaves paid well in produce for the amulets and charms I sold them. That produce I converted into coin, but it came in too slow. In Europe I might calculate on better opportunities for gain, and to

Europe I took the first opportunity of sailing, that I might join the mistress I had never seen, as attendant on her and her child. In their service I have remained to this day. The mother I have always respected for her indomitable courage; the daughter I loved from the first for her blue eyes, that reminded me of my boy.

“And now look at me once more, my child—my darling. I have found you when I had almost left off hoping; I have got you when I never expected to see you again; and I am rewarded at last!”

Slap-Jack, whose sentiments of filial affection came out the mellower for rum-and-water, accepted the Quadroon’s endearments with sufficient affability, and being naturally a good-hearted, easy-going fellow, gladly enacted the part of dutiful son to a mother who had suffered such long anxiety on his account.

“A-course,” said he, returning her embrace, “now you’ve got a son, you ain’t a-goin’ to keep him in this here round-house, laid up in lavender like, as precious as a Blue Mountain monkey pickled in rum. We’ll just wait here a bit, you and me, safe and snug, while the land-breeze holds, and then drop easily down into the town, rouse out my shipmates, able seamen every man of them, and

go in for a regular spree. 'Tain't every day as a chap finds his mother, you know, and such a start as this here didn't ought to be passed over without a bobbery."

She listened to him delighted. His queer phrases were sweet in her ears; to her they were no vulgar sea-slang, but the echo of a love-music that had charmed her heart, and drowned her senses half a lifetime ago; that rang with something of the old thrilling vibration still; but the wild look of terror that had scared him more than once gleamed again in her eyes, and she laid her hand on his shoulder as if to keep him down by force, while she whispered—"My child, not so! How rash, how reckless! Just like your father; but he, at least, had not your fate to fear. Do you not see your danger? Can you not guess why I concealed your birth, hid you up in your babyhood, and smuggled you out of the island as soon as you could run? Born of a slave, on a slave estate, do you not know, my boy, that you, too, are a slave?"

"Gammon! mother," exclaimed Slap-Jack, nothing daunted. "What *me*?—captain of the foretop aboard 'The Bashful Maid'—six guns on the main-deck, besides carronades—master and owner, Cap-

tain George! and talk to me as if I was one of them darkies wot does mule's work with monkey's allowance! Who's to come and take me, I should like to know? Let 'em heave a-head an' do it, that's all—a score at a spell if they can muster 'em. I'll show 'em pretty quick what sort of a slave they can make out of an able seaman!"

"Hush, hush!" she exclaimed, listening earnestly, and with an expression of intense fear contracting her worn features; "I can hear them coming—negroes by the footfall, and a dozen at least. They will be at the door in five minutes. They have turned by the old hog-plum now. As you love your life, my boy; nay, as you love your mother, who has pined and longed for you all these years, let me hide you away in there. You will be safe. Trust me, you will be safe enough; they will never think of looking for you there!"

So speaking, and notwithstanding much good-humoured expostulation and resistance from Slap-Jack, who, treating the whole affair as a jest, was yet inclined to fight it out all the same, Célandine succeeded in pushing her son into an inner division of the hut, containing only a bed-place, shut off by

a strong wooden door. This she closed hurriedly at the very moment a dozen pattering footsteps halted outside, and a rough negro voice, in accents more imperative than respectful, demanded instant admission.



CHAPTER XIII.

JACK A-GROUND.

OPENING the door with a yawn, and stretching her arms like one lately roused from sleep, the Quadroon found herself face to face with the Coromantee, backed by nearly a score of negroes, the idlest and most dissolute slaves on the estate. All seemed more or less intoxicated, and Célandine, who knew the African character thoroughly, by no means liked their looks. She was aware that much disaffection existed in the plantation, and the absence of this disorderly gang from their work at so early an hour in the afternoon argued something like open revolt. It would have been madness, however, to show fear, and the Obi-woman possessed, moreover, a larger share of

physical courage than is usual with her sex: assuming, therefore, an air of extreme dignity, she stationed herself in the doorway and demanded sternly what they wanted.

Hippolyte, who seemed to be leader of the party, doffed his cabbage-tree hat with ironical politeness, and pointing over his shoulder at two grinning negroes laden with plantains and other garden produce, came to business at once.

"We buy,—you sell, Missee Célandine. Same as storekeeper down Port Welcome. Fust ask gentlemen step in, sit down, take something to drink."

There was that in his manner which made her afraid to refuse, and inviting the whole party to enter, she accommodated them with difficulty in the hut. Reviewing her assembled guests, the Quadroon's heart sank within her; but she was conscious of possessing cunning and courage, so summoned both to her aid.

A negro, under excitement from whatever cause, is a formidable-looking companion. Those animal points of head and countenance, by which he is distinguished from the white man, then assume an unseemly prominence. The lips thicken, the temples

swell, the eyes roll, the brow seems to recede, and the whole face alters for the worse, like that of a vicious horse, when he lays his ears back, prepared to kick.

Célandine's visitors displayed all these alarming signs, and several other disagreeable peculiarities, the result of partial intoxication. Some of them carried axes, she observed, and all had knives. Their attire too, though of the gaudiest colours, was extremely scanty, ragged, and unwashed. They jested with one another freely enough, as they sat huddled together on the floor of the hut, but showed little of the childish good-humour common among prosperous and well-ordered slaves ; while she augured the worst from the absence of that politeness which, to do him justice, is a prominent characteristic of the negro. Nevertheless, she dissembled her misgivings, affected an air of dignified welcome, handed round the calabash, with its accompanying stone bottle, to all in turn, and felt but little reassured to find that the rum was nearly exhausted when it had completed the circle.

“Thirteen gentlemen, Missee Célandine,” observed the Coromantee, tossing off his measure of raw spirits with exceeding relish ; “thirteen charms,

best Obi-woman can furnish for the price, 'gainst evil eye, snake-bite, jumbo-stroke, fire, water, and cold steel, all 'counted for, honourable, in dem plantain baskets. Hi! you lazy nigger, pay out. Say, again, missee, what day this of the month?"

Célandine affected to consider.

"The thirteenth," she answered gravely; "the most unlucky day in the whole year."

Hippolyte's black face fell. "Golly!" said he. "Unlucky! for why? for what? Dis nigger laugh at luck," he added, brightening up and turning what liquor was left in the stone bottle down his own throat. "Looke here, missee; you Obi-woman, right enough; you nigger too, yaller all same as black: you go pray Jumbo for luck. All paid for in dat basket. Pray Jumbo no rain to-night, put um fire out. Our work, make bobbery; your work, stay up mountain where spirit can hear, and pray Jumbo till monkeys wake."

A suspicion that had already dawned on the Quadroon's mind was now growing horribly distinct. It was obvious some important movement must be intended by the gang that filled her hut, and there was every fear a general rising might take place of all the slaves on the plantation, if indeed the insurrection spread no further than the Mont-

mirail estate. She knew, none better, the nature of the half-reclaimed savage. She thought of her courageous, high-souled mistress, of her delicate, beautiful nursling, and shivered while she pictured them in the power of this huge black monster who sat grinning at her over the empty calabash. She even forgot for the moment her own long-lost son, hidden up within six feet of her, and the double danger he would run in the event of detection. She could only turn her mind in one direction, and that was, where madame and mademoiselle were sitting, placid and unconscious, in the rich white dresses her own fingers had helped to make.

Their possible fate was too horrible to contemplate. She forced it from her thoughts, and with all her power of self-concentration, addressed herself to the means of saving them at any cost. In such an emergency as the present, surrounded, and perhaps suspected, by the mutineers, dissimulation seemed her only weapon left, and to dissimulation she betook herself without delay.

"Hippolyte," said she, "you are a good soldier. You command all these black fellows; I can see it in your walk. I always said you had the air of an officer of France."

The Coromantee seemed not insensible to flattery.

He grinned, wagged his head, rolled his eyes, and was obviously well pleased.

"Dese niggers make me deir colonel," said he, springing from the floor to an attitude of military attention. "Hab words of command like buckra musketeer. *Par file à droite—Marche ! Volte-face !* Run for your lives !"

"I knew it," she replied, "and you ought to have learned already to trust your comrades. Are we not in the same ranks ? You say yourself, yellow and black are all one. You and I are near akin ; your people are the people of my mother's mother ; whom you trust, I trust ; whom you hate, I hate, but far more bitterly, because my injuries are older and deeper than yours."

He opened his eyes wondering, but the rum had taken effect, and nothing, not even the Quadroon's disloyalty to her mistress, seemed improbable now. An Obi-woman too, if really in earnest, he considered a valuable auxiliary ; so signed his approval by another grin and a grunt of acquiescence.

"I live but for one object now," continued Célandine, in a tone of repressed fury that did credit to her power of acting. "I have been waiting all my life for my revenge, and it seems to have come at last. The Marquise should have given me my

freedom long ago if she wished me to forgive. Ay, they may call me *Mustee*, but I am black, black as yourself, my brave Hippolyte, at heart. She struck me once,—I tell you, struck me with her riding-whip, far away yonder in France, and I will have her blood.”

It is needless to observe this imputed violence was a fabrication for the especial benefit of Hippolyte, and the energy with which he pronounced the ejaculation, “Golly!” denoted that he placed implicit reliance on its truth.

“You are brave,” continued Célandine; “you are strong; you are the fine tall negro whom we call the Pride of the Plantation. You do not know what it is to hate like a poor weak woman. I would have no scruple, no mercy; I would spare none, neither madame nor mademoiselle.”

“Ma’amselle come into woods with me,” interrupted Hippolyte, with a horrible leer. “Good enough wife for Pride of Plantation. Lilly face look best by um side of black man. Ma’amselle guess me come for marry her. When floggee Fleurette, look at me so, afore all de niggers, sweet as molasses!”

Again Célandine shivered. The wretch’s vanity would have been ludicrous, had he not been so

formidable from his recklessness, and the authority he seemed to hold over his comrades. She prepared to learn the worst.

"They will both be in our power to-night, I suppose," said she, repressing with a strong effort her disgust and fierce desire to snatch his long knife and stab him where he stood. "Tell me your plan of attack, my brave colonel, and trust me to help you to the utmost."

The Coromantee looked about him suspiciously, rolling his eyes in obvious perplexity. The superstition inherent in his nature made him desirous of obtaining her assistance, while the Quadroon's antecedents, and particularly her marriage with the overseer, seemed to infer that she would prove less zealous than she affected to be in the cause of insurrection. He made up his mind therefore to bind her by an oath, which he himself dictated, and made her swear by the mysterious power she served, and from which she derived her influence, to be true, silent, and merciless, till the great event had been accomplished, all the whites in authority massacred, and the whole estate in the power of the slaves. Every penalty, both horrible and ludicrous, that the grotesque imagination of a savage could devise, was called down upon her

head in the event of treachery; and Célandine, who was a sufficiently good Catholic at heart, swallowed all these imprecations imperturbably enough, pledging herself without the slightest hesitation to the conspiracy.

Then Hippolyte was satisfied and unfolded his plans, while the others gathered round with fearful interest, wagging their heads, rolling their eyes, grinning, stamping, and ejaculating deep gutturals of applause.

His scheme was feasible enough; nor to one who knew no scruples of gratitude, no instincts of compassion, did it present any important obstacles. He was at the head of an organized body, comprising nearly all the male slaves on the plantation; a body prepared to rise at a moment's notice, if only assured of success. The dozen negroes who accompanied him had constituted themselves his guards, and were pledged to strike the first blow, at his command. They were strong, able-bodied, sensual, idle, dissolute, unscrupulous, and well enough fitted for their enterprise, but that they were arrant cowards, one and all. As, however, little resistance could be anticipated, this poltroonery was the more to be dreaded by their victims, that in the hour

of triumph it would surely turn to cruelty and excess.

Hippolyte, who was not deficient in energy, had also been in communication with the disaffected slaves on the adjoining estates ; these too were sworn to rise at a given signal, and the Coromantee, feeling that his own enterprise could scarcely fail, entertained a fervent hope that in a few hours the whole of the little island, from sea to sea, would be in possession of the negroes, and he himself chosen as their chief. The sack and burning of Port Welcome, the massacre of the planters and abduction of their families, were exciting little incidents of the future, on which he could hardly trust himself to dwell ; but the first step in the great enterprise was to be taken at Montmirail West, and to its details Célandine now listened with a horror that, while it curdled her blood, she was forced to veil under a pretence of zeal and enthusiasm in the cause.

Her only hope was in the brigantine. Her early associations had taught her to place implicit reliance on a boat's-crew of English sailors, and if she could but delay the attack until she had communicated with the privateer, mademoiselle, for it was of mademoiselle she chiefly thought,

might be rescued even yet. If she could but speak to her son, lying within three feet of her ! If she could but make him understand the emergency ! How she trusted he overheard their conversation ! How she prayed he might not have been asleep the whole time !

Hippolyte's plan of attack was simple enough. It would be dark in a couple of hours. Long before then, he and his little band meant to advance as far as the skirts of the bush, from whence they could reconnoitre the house. Doors and windows would all be open. There was but one white man in the place, and he unarmed. Nothing could be easier than to overpower the overseer, and perhaps, for Célandine's sake, his life might be spared. Then, it was the Coromantee's intention to secure the Marquise and her daughter, which he opined might be done with little risk, and at the expense of a shriek or two ; to collect in the storeroom any of the domestic slaves, male or female, who showed signs of resistance, and there lock them up ; to break open the cellar, serve out a plentiful allowance of wine to his guards, and then, setting fire to the house, carry the Marquise and her daughter into the mountains. The former, to be kept as a hostage, slain, or otherwise dis-

posed of, according to circumstances; the latter, as the African expressed it with hideous glee, "for make lilly-face chief wife to dis here handsome nigger!"

Célandine affected to accept his views with great enthusiasm, but objected to the time appointed.

"The moon," said she gravely, "is yet in her first quarter. Her spirit is gone a journey to the mountains of Africa to bless the bones of our forefathers. It will be back to-morrow. Jumbo has not been sufficiently propitiated. Let us sacrifice to him for one night more with jar and calabash. I will send down for rum to the stores. Brave colonel, you and your guards shall bivouac here outside her hut, while the Obi-woman remains within to spend the night in singing and making charms. Jumbo will thus be pleased, and to-morrow the whole island may be ours without opposition."

But Hippolyte was not to be deceived so easily. His plans admitted of no delay, and the flames ascending from the roof of Montmirail West, that same night, were to be the signal for a general rising from sea to sea. His short period of influence had already taught him that such a blow as

he meditated, to be effectual, must be struck at once. Moreover, the quality of cunning in the savage seems strong in proportion to his degradation; the Coromantee was a very fox for vigilance and suspicion, nor did he fail to attribute Célandine's desire for procrastination to its true motive.

"To-night, Obi-woman!" said he resolutely. "To-night, or no night at all. Dis nigger no leave yaller woman here, fear of accidents. Perhaps tomorrow free blacks kill you same as white. You come with us down mountain-side into clearing. We keep you safe. You make prayer and sing whole time."

With a mischievous leer at a couple of his stalwart followers, he pointed to the Quadroon. They sprang from the ground and secured her, one on each side. The unfortunate Obi-woman strove hard to disarm suspicion by an affectation of ready compliance, but it was obvious they mistrusted her fidelity and had no intention of letting her out of their sight. It was with difficulty that she obtained a few moments' respite, on the plea that night was about to fall, for the purpose of winding her shawl more carefully round her head, and in that brief space she endeavoured to warn her son of the coming outbreak, with a

maddening doubt the while that he might not understand their purport, even if he could hear her words. Turning towards the door, behind which he was concealed, under pretence of arranging her head-gear at a bit of broken looking-glass against the panel, she sang, with as marked an emphasis as she dared, a scrap of some doggrel sea-ditty, which she had picked up from her first love in the old happy days long ago :—

“The boatswain looked upon the land,
And shrill his whistle blew,
The oars were out, the boat was manned,
Says he, ‘My gallant crew,

“ ‘Our captain in a dungeon lies,
The sharks have got him flat,
But if we fire the town, my boys,
We’ll have him out of that !

“ ‘We’ll stop their jaw, we’ll spike their guns !
We’ll larn ’em what they’re at—
You bend your backs, and pull, my sons,
We’ll have him out of that !’ ”

This she sang twice, and then professed her readiness to accompany Hippolyte and his band down the mountain, delaying their departure, however, by all the means she could think of, including profuse offers of hospitality, which had but little effect, possibly because the guests were personally satisfied that there was nothing left to drink.

Nay, even on the very threshold of the hut she turned back once more, affecting to have forgotten the most important of the amulets she carried about her person, and, crossing the floor with a step that must have awakened the soundest sleeper, repeated, in clear loud tones, the boatswain's injunction to his men—

“ You bend your backs, and pull, my sons,
We'll have him out of that ! ”



CHAPTER XIV.

JACK A-FLOAT.

BUT Slap-Jack was not asleep, far from it. His narrow hiding-place offered but little temptation to repose, and almost the first sentence uttered by Hippolyte aroused the suspicions of a man accustomed to anticipate, without fearing, danger, or, as he expressed it, "to look out for squalls."

He listened therefore intently the whole time, and although the Coromantee's jargon was often unintelligible, managed to gather quite enough of its meaning to assure him that some gross outrage was in preparation, of which a white lady and her daughter were to be the victims. Now it is not only on the boards of a seaport theatre that the British sailor vindicates his character for generous

courage on behalf of the conventional "female in distress." The stage is, after all, a representation, however extravagant, of real life, and the caricature must not be exaggerated out of all likeness to its original. Coarse in his language, rough in his bearing, reckless and riotous from the very nature of his calling, there is yet in the thorough-going English seaman a leavening of tenderness, simplicity, and self-sacrifice, which, combined with his dauntless bravery, affords no ignoble type of manhood. He is a child in his fancies, his credulity, his affections; a lion in his defiance of peril and his sovereign contempt for pain.

With regard to woman, whatever may be his practice, his creed is pure, exalted, and utterly opposed to his own experience; while his instincts prompt him on all occasions, and against any odds, to take part with the weaker side. Compared with the landsman, he is always a little behind the times in worldly knowledge, possessing the faults and virtues of an earlier age. With both of these in some excess, his chivalry is unimpeachable, and a sense of honour that would not disgrace the noblest chapters of knighthood is to be found nerving the blue-streaked arms and swelling the brawny chests that man the fore-castle.

Slap-Jack knew enough of his late-discovered mother's position to be familiar with the name of the Marquise and the situation of Montmirail West. As he was the only seaman belonging to 'The Bashful Maid' who had been tempted beyond the precincts of the port, this knowledge was shared by none of his shipmates. Captain George himself postponing his shore-going from hour to hour, while he had work in hand, little dreamed he was within two leagues of Cerise. Beaudésir had never repeated his visit to the town ; and every other man in the brigantine was too much occupied by duty or pleasure—meaning anchor-watch on board, alternated by rum and fiddlers ashore—to think of extending his cruise a yard further inland than the nearest drinking-house.

On Slap-Jack, therefore, devolved the task of rescuing the Marquise and her daughter from the grasp of "that big black swab," as the foretop-man mentally denominated him, whom he longed ardently to "pitch into" on the spot. He understood the position. His mother's sea-song was addressed to no inattentive nor unwilling ears. He saw the difficulties and, indeed, the dangers of his undertaking ; but the latter he despised, while the former he resolved to overcome ; and he never lay

out upon a yard to reef topsails in the fiercest squall with a clearer brain or a stouter heart than he now summoned to his aid on behalf of the ladies whom his mother loved so well.

Creeping from his hiding-place, he listened anxiously to the retreating foot-fall of the blacks, and even waited several minutes after it had died away to assure himself the coast was clear. Discovery would have been fatal ; for armed though he was with a cutlass and pistols, thirteen to one, as he sagely reflected, was long odds ; and “if I should be scuttled,” thought he, “before I can make signals, why, what’s to become of the whole convoy?” Therefore he was very cautious and reflective. He pondered, he calculated, he reckoned his time, he enumerated his obstacles, he laid out his plans before he proceeded to action. His only chance was to reach the brigantine without delay, and report the whole matter to the skipper forthwith, who he was convinced would at once furnish a boat’s crew to defend the ladies, and probably put himself at their head.

Emerging from the hut, he observed to his consternation that it was already dusk. There is but a short twilight in these low latitudes, where the evening hour—sweetest of the whole

twenty-four—is gone almost as soon as it arrives—

“The sun’s rim dips,
The stars rush out,
At one stride comes the dark.”

And that dark, in the jungle of a West Indian island, is black as midnight.

It was well for Slap-Jack that a seaman’s instincts had prompted him to take his bearings before he came up the mountain. These, from time to time, he corrected during his ascent, at the many places where he paused for breath. He knew, therefore, the exact direction of the town and harbour. Steering by the stars, he was under no apprehension of losing his way, and could make for the brigantine where she lay. Tightening his belt, then, he commenced the descent at a run, resolving to keep the path as long as he could see it, and when it was lost in the bush at last, to plunge boldly through till he reached the shore.

The misadventure he foresaw soon came to pass. A path which he could hardly have followed by daylight, without Célandine to pilot him, soon disappeared from beneath his feet in the deepening gloom. He had not left the hut many minutes ere he was struggling, breast-high, amongst the wild vines and other creepers that twined and festooned

in a tangle of vegetable network from tree to tree.

The scene was novel and picturesque, yet I am afraid he cursed and swore a good deal, less impressed with its beauty than alive to its inconveniences. Overhead, indeed, he caught a glimpse of the stars, by which he guided his course through the interlacing boughs of the tall forest trees, and underfoot, the steady lamp of the glow-worm, and the sparks of a thousand wheeling fire-flies, shed a light about his path ; but these advantages only served to point out the dangers and difficulties of his progress. With their dubious help, every creeper thicker than ordinary assumed the appearance of some glistening snake, swinging from the branch in a grim repose that it was death to disturb ; every rotten stump leaning forward in its decay, draped with its garment of trailing parasites, took the form of a watchful savage, poising his gigantic form in act to strike ; while a wild boar, disturbed from his lair between the roots of an enormous gum-tree to shamble off at a jog-trot, grumbling in search of thicker covert, with burning eye, gnashing tusks, and most discordant grunt, swelled to the size of a rhinoceros. Slap-Jack's instincts prompted him to salute the monster with a shot from one of the pistols that

hung at his belt, but reflecting on the necessity of caution, he refrained with difficulty, consoling himself by the anticipation of several days' leave ashore, and a regular shooting party with his mates, in consideration of his services to-night.

Thus he struggled on, breathless, exhausted, indefatigable—now losing himself altogether, till a more open space in the branches, through which he could see the stars, assured him that he was in a right direction—now obtaining a glimpse of some cane-piece, or other clearing, white in the tender light of the young moon, which had already risen, and thus satisfying himself that he was gradually emerging from the bush, and consequently nearing the shore—now tripping over a fallen tree—now held fast in a knot of creepers—now pierced to the bone by a prickly cactus, torn, bleeding, tired, sore, and drenched with perspiration, but never losing heart for a moment, nor deviating, notwithstanding his enforced windings, one cable's length from the direct way.

Thus at last he emerged on a clearing already trenched and hoed for the reception of sugar-canes, and, to his infinite joy, beheld his own shadow, black and distinct, in the trembling moonlight. The bush was now behind him, the slope of the

hill in his favour, and he could run down, uninterrupted, towards the pale sea lying spread out like a sheet of silver at his feet. He crossed a road here that he knew must lead him into the town, but it would have taken him somewhat out of his course for the brigantine, and he had resolved to lose no time, even for the chance of obtaining a boat.

He made, therefore, direct for the shore, and in a few minutes he was standing on a strip of sand, with the retiring tide plashing gratefully on his ear, while his eyes were fixed on the tapering spars of 'The Bashful Maid,' and the light glimmering in her foretop.

He stepped back a few paces to lay his arms and some of his garments behind a rock, a little above high-water mark. There was small chance he would ever find them again, but he belonged to a profession of which the science is essentially precautionary, and the habit of foresight was a second nature to Slap-Jack. In a few more seconds he was up to his knees, his middle, his breast-bone, in the cooling waters, till a receding wave lifted him off his feet, and he struck out boldly for the brigantine.

How delightful to his heated skin was the contact of the pure fresh buoyant element ! Notwith-

standing his fatigue, his hurry, his anxiety, he could have shouted aloud in joy and triumph as he felt himself wafted on those long, regular, and powerful strokes nearer and nearer to his object. It was the exultation of human strength and skill and daring, dominant over nature, unassisted by mechanical art.

Yet was there one frightful drawback ; a contingency which had been present to his mind from the very beginning, even while he was beating laboriously through the jungle, but which he had never permitted himself to realize, and on which it would now be maddening to dwell : Port Welcome was infested with sharks ! He forced himself to ignore the danger, and swam gallantly on, till the wash and ripple of the tide upon the shore was far behind him, and he heard only his own deep measured breathing, and the monotonous splash of those springing, regulated strokes that drove him steadily out to sea. He was already tired, and had turned on his back more than once for relief, ere the hull of the brigantine rose black and steep out of the water half a cable's length ahead. He counted that after fifty more strokes he would summon breath to hail the watch on deck. He had scarce completed them, ere a chill

went curdling through his veins from head to heel, and if ever Slap-Jack lost heart it was then. The water surged beneath him, and lifted his whole body, like a wave, though the surrounding surface was smooth as a mill-pond. One desperate kick, that shot him two fathoms at a stroke, and his passing foot grazed some slimy, scaly substance, while from the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse the moment after of the back-fin of a shark. Then he hailed in good earnest, swimming his wickedest the while, and ere the voracious sea-scurge, or its consort, could turn over for a leisurely snap at him, Slap-Jack was safe in the bight of a rope, and the anchor-watch, not a little astonished, were hauling their exhausted shipmate over the side.

“Come on board, sir!” exclaimed the new arrival, scrambling breathless to his feet, after tumbling head-foremost over the gunwale, and pulling with ludicrous courtesy at his wet hair. “Come on board, sir. Hands wanted immediate. Ax your honour’s pardon. So blown I can hardly speak. First-class row among the niggers. Bobbery all over the island. Devil to pay, and no pitch hot!”

Captain George was on deck, which perhaps accounted for the rapidity of the foretop-man’s

rescue, and although justly affronted by so unceremonious a return on the part of a liberty-man who had outstayed his leave, he saw at a glance that some great emergency was imminent, and prepared to meet it with habitual coolness.

"Silence, you fool!" said he, pointing to a negro amongst the crew. "Lend him a jacket, some of you. Come below at once to my cabin, and make your report. You can be punished afterwards."

Slap-Jack followed his commander nothing loth. The after-punishment, as being postponed for twenty-four hours at least, was a matter of no moment, but a visit to the Captain's cabin entailed, according to the etiquette of the service, a measure of grog, mixed on certain liberal principles, that from time immemorial have regulated the strength of that complimentary refreshment.

In all such interviews it is customary for the skipper to produce his spirit-case, a tumbler, and a jug of water. The visitor helps himself from the former, and esteems it only good breeding that he should charge his glass to the depth of three fingers with alcohol, filling it up with the weaker fluid. When the thickness of a seaman's fingers is considered, and the breadth to which he can spread

them out on such occasions, it is easy to conceive how little space is left near the rim of the vessel for that insipid element, every additional drop of which is considered by competent judges to spoil the beverage. Slap-Jack mixed as liberally as another. Ere his draught, however, was half-finished, or his report nearly concluded, the Captain had turned the hands up, and ordered a boat to be manned forthwith, leaving Beaudésir to command in his absence; but true to his usual system, informing no one, not even the latter, of his intentions or his destination.



CHAPTER XV.

BESIEGED.

IN the mean time poor Célandine found herself hurried down the mountain by Hippolyte and his band, in a state of anxiety and alarm that would have paralysed the energies of most women, but that roused all the savage qualities dormant in the character of the Quadroon. Not a word of her captors, not a look escaped her; and she soon discovered, greatly to her dismay, that she was regarded less as an auxiliary than a hostage. She was placed in the centre of the band, unbound indeed, and apparently at liberty; but no sooner did she betray, by the slightest independence of movement, that she considered herself a free agent, than four stalwart blacks closed in on her,

with brutal glee, attempting no concealment of a determination to retain her in their power till they had completed their merciless design.

“Once gone,” said Hippolyte, politely affecting great reverence for the Obi-woman’s supernatural powers, “never catchee no more! — Jumbo fly away with yaller woman, same as black. Dis nigger no ’fraid of Jumbo, so long as Missee Célandine at um back. Soon dark now. March on, you black villains, and keep your ranks, same as buckra Musketeer!”

With such exhortations to discipline, and an occasional compliment to his own military talents, Hippolyte beguiled their journey down the mountain. It seemed to Célandine that far too short a space of time had elapsed ere they reached the skirts of the forest, and even in the deepening twilight could perceive clearly enough the long low building of *Cash-a-crou*, now called Montmirail West.

The lamps were already lit in the sitting-room on the ground-floor. From where she stood, in the midst of the band, outwardly stern and collected, quivering with rage and fear within, the Quadroon could distinguish the figures of Madame la Marquise and her daughter, moving here and

there in the apartment, or leaning out at window for a breath of the cool, refreshing evening air.

Their commander kept his men under covert of the woods, waiting till it should be quite dark. There was little to fear from a garrison consisting but of two ladies, backed by Fleurette and Bartoletti, for the other domestic slaves were either involved in the conspiracy or had been inveigled out of the way by its chief promoters; yet notwithstanding the weakness of the besieged, some dread of their ascendancy made the negroes loth to encounter by daylight even such weak champions of the white race as two helpless women and a cowardly Italian overseer.

Nevertheless, every moment gained was worth a purse of gold. Célandine, affecting to identify herself with the conspirators, urged on them the prudence of delay. Hippolyte, somewhat deceived by her enthusiasm, offered an additional reason for postponing the attack, in the brilliancy of a conflagration under a night sky. He intended, he said, to begin by setting fire to the house—there could then be no resistance from within. There would be plenty of time, he opined, for drink and plunder before the flames gained a complete ascendancy, and he seemed to cherish some vague

half-formed notion that it would be a fine thing to appear before Cerise in the character of a hero, who should rescue her from a frightful death.

A happy thought struck the Quadroon.

“It was lucky you brought me with you,” said she earnestly. “Brave as you are, I fancy you would have been scared had you acted on your own plan. You talk of firing *Cash-a-crou* as you would of roasting a turtle in its shell. Do you know that madame keeps a dozen barrels of gunpowder stowed away about the house—nobody knows where but herself. You would have looked a little foolish, I think, my brave colonel, to find your long body blown clean over the Sulphur Mountain into the sea on the other side of the island. You and your guard here are as handsome a set of blacks as a yellow woman need wish to look on. Not a morsel would have been left of any one of you the size of my hand!”

“Golly!” exclaimed Hippolyte in consternation. “Misse Célandine, you go free for tanks, when dis job clean done. Hi! you black fellows, keep under shadow of gum-tree dere—change um plan now,” he added thoughtfully; and without taking his keen eyes off Célandine, walked from one to

the other of his band, whispering fresh instructions to each.

The Quadroon counted the time by the beating of her heart. "Now," she thought, "my boy must have gained the edge of the forest—ten minutes more to cross the new cane-pieces—another ten to reach the shore. He can swim of course—his father swam like a pilot-fish. In forty minutes he might be on board. Five to man a boat—and ten more to pull her in against the ebb. Then they have fully a league to march, and sailors are such bad walkers." At this stage of her reflections something went through her heart like a knife. She thought of the grim ground-sharks, heaving and gaping in the warm translucent depths of the harbour at Port Welcome.

But meanwhile Hippolyte had gathered confidence from the bearing of his comrades. Their numbers and fierceness inspired him with courage, and he resolved to enter the house at the head of his chosen body-guard, whilst he surrounded it with a score of additional mutineers who had joined him according to previous agreement at the edge of the forest. These, too, had brought with them a fresh supply of rum, and Célandine

observed with horror its stimulating effects on the evil propensities of the band.

While he made his further dispositions, she found herself left for a few seconds comparatively unwatched, and at once stole into the open moonlight, where her white dress could be discerned plainly from the house. She knew her husband would be smoking his evening tobacco, according to custom, in the verandah. At little more than a hundred paces he could hardly fail to see her ; and in an instant she had unbound the red turban and waved it round her head, in the desperate hope that he might accept that warning for a danger signal. The quick-witted Italian seemed to comprehend at once that something was wrong. He imitated her gesture, retired into the house, and the next minute his figure was seen in the sitting-room with the Marquise and her daughter. By this time Hippolyte had returned to her side, and she could only watch in agony for the result. Completely surrounded by the intoxicated and infuriated negroes, there seemed to be no escape for the besieged, while the looks and gestures of their leader, closely copied by his chosen band, denoted how little of courtesy or common humanity was to be expected from the Coromantee, excited to

madness by all the worst passions of his savage nature bursting from the enforced restraints that had so long kept them down.

A bolder spirit than the Signor's might have been excused for betraying considerable apprehension in such a crisis, and in good truth Bartoletti was fairly frightened out of his wits. In common with the rest of the whites on the island, he had long suspected a conspiracy amongst the negroes, and feared that such an insurrection would take place; but no great social misfortune is ever really believed in till it comes, and he had neither taken measures for its prevention, nor thoroughly realized the magnitude of the evil. Now that he felt it was upon him he knew not where to turn for aid. There was no time to make phrases or to stand on ceremony. He rushed into the sitting-room with a blanched cheek and a wild eye, that caused each of the ladies to drop her work on her lap, and gaze at him in consternation.

"Madame!" he exclaimed, and his jaw shook so that he could hardly form the syllables, "we must leave the house at once—we must save ourselves. There is an *émeute*, a revolt, a rebellion among the slaves. I know them—the monsters! They will not be appeased till they have drunk our blood.

Oh! why did I ever come to this accursed country?"

Cerise turned as white as a sheet—her blue eyes were fixed, her lips apart. Even the Marquise grew pale, though her colour came back, and she held her head the more erect a moment afterwards. "Sit down," she said imperiously, yet kindly enough. "Take breath, my good man, and take courage also. Tell me exactly what you have seen;" and added, turning to Cerise, "don't be frightened, my child—these overseers are sad alarmists. I dare say it is only what the negroes call a 'bobbery' after all!"

Then Bartoletti explained that he had seen his wife waving a red shawl from the edge of the jungle; that this was a preconcerted signal by which they had agreed to warn each other of imminent danger; that it was never to be used except on great emergencies; and that he was quite sure it was intended to convey to him that she was in the power of the slaves, and that the rising they had so often talked about had taken place at last.

The Marquise thought for a moment. She seemed to have no fear now that she realized her danger. Only once, when her eye rested on her daughter, she shuddered visibly. Otherwise, her

bearing was less that of a tender woman in peril of her life, than of some wise commander, foiled and beset by the enemy, yet not altogether without hope of securing his retreat.

So might have looked one of her warlike ancestors when the besiegers set fire to his castle by the Garonne, and he resolved to betake himself, with his stout veterans, to the square stone keep where the well was dug—a maiden fortress, that had never yet succumbed to famine nor been forced by escalade.

“Is there any one in the house whom we can trust?” said the Marquise; and even while she spoke a comely black girl came crawling to her feet, and seized her hand to cover it with tears and kisses.

“Iss, missis!” exclaimed Fleurette, for Fleurette it was, who had indeed been listening at the door for the last five minutes. “You trust *me*! Life for life! Blood for blood! No fear Jumbo, so lilly ma’amselle go out safe. Trust Fleurette, missis. Trust Fleurette, ma’amselle. Fleurette die at um house-door, so! better than ugly black floggee-man come in.” The Marquise listened calmly.

“Attend to me, Fleurette,” said she, with an authoritative gesture. “Go at once through the

kitchen into the dark path that leads to the old summer-house. See if the road to Port Welcome is clear. There is no bush on that side within five hundred paces, and if they mean to stop us, they must post a guard between the house and the gum-trees. Do not show yourself, girl, but if they take you, say Célandine sent you down to the negro-houses for eggs. Quick, and come back here like lightning. Bartoletti—have you any fire-arms? Do not be afraid, my darling,” she repeated, turning to her daughter. “I know these wretched people well. You need but show a bold front, and they would turn away from a lady’s fan if you only shook it hard at them.”

“I am not afraid, mamma,” answered Cerise, valiantly, though her face was very pale, and her knees shook. “I—I don’t *like* it, of course, but I can do anything you tell me. Oh, mamma! do you, do you think they will kill us?” she added, with rather a sudden breakdown of the courage she tried so gallantly to rally.

“Kill us, mademoiselle!” exclaimed the overseer, quaking in every limb. “Oh, no! never! They cannot be so bad as that. We will temporize, we will supplicate, we will make terms with them; we will offer freedom, and rum, and plunder;

we will go on our knees to their chief, and entreat his mercy !”

The girl looked at him contemptuously. Strange to say, her courage rose as his fell, and she seemed to gather strength and energy from the abject selfishness of his despair. The Marquise did not heed him, for she heard Fleurette’s foot-steps returning, and was herself busied with an oblong wooden case, brass-bound, and carefully locked up, that she lifted from the recess of a cupboard in the room.

Fleurette’s black feet could carry her swiftly and lightly as a bird. She had followed her instructions implicitly, had crept noiselessly through the kitchen, and advanced unseen to the old summer-house. Peering from that concealment, on the moon-lit surface of the lawn, she was horrorstruck to observe nearly a score of slaves intently watching the house. She hurried back panting to her mistress’s presence, and made her discouraging report.

Madame de Montmirail was very grave now. The affair had become more than serious. It was, in truth, desperate. Once again, as she looked at her daughter, came that strange quiver over her features, that shudder of repressed horror rather

than pain. It was succeeded, as before, by a moment of deep reflection, and then her eye kindled, her lips tightened, and all her soft voluptuous beauty hardened into the obstinate courage of despair.

Cerise sank on her knees to pray, and rose with a pale, serene, undaunted face. Hers was the passive endurance of the martyr. Her mother's the tameless valour of the champion, inherited through a long line of the turbulent La-Fiertés, not one of whom had ever blenched from death nor yielded an inch before the face of man.

"Bartoletti!" said the Marquise. "Bar the doors and windows; they can be forced with half a dozen strokes, but in war every minute is of value. Hold this rabble in parley as long as you can. I dare not trust you with my pistols, for a weak heart makes a shaking hand, and I think fighting seems less your trade than mine. When you can delay them no longer, arrange your own terms with the villains. It is possible they may spare you for your wife's sake. Quick, man! I hear them coming now. Cerise, our bed-room has a strong oaken door, and they cannot reach the window without a ladder, which leaves us but one enemy to deal with at a time. Courage, my

darling! Kiss me! Again, again! my own! And now. A woman dies but once! Here goes for France, and the lilies on the White Flag!"

Thus encouraging her child, the Marquise led the way to the bedchamber they jointly occupied, a plainly furnished room, of which the only ornament was the Prince-Marshal's portrait, already mentioned as having occupied the place of honour in madame's boudoir at the Hôtel Montmirail. Both women glanced at it as they entered the apartment. Then the Marquise, laying down the oblong box she carried, carefully shaded the night-lamp that burned by her bedside, and peered stealthily from the window to reconnoitre.

"Four, six, ten," said she, calmly, "besides their leader, a tall, big negro, very like Hippolyte. It *is* Hippolyte. *You* at least, my friend, will not leave this house alive! I can hardly miss so fair a mark as those broad black shoulders. This of course is the *corps d'élite*. Those at the back of the house I do not regard so much. The kitchen door is strong, and they will do nothing if their champions are repulsed. Courage again, my child! All is not lost yet. Open that box and help me to load my pistols. Strange, that I should have practised with them for years, only to beat Madame

de Sabran, and now to-night we must both trust our safety to a true eye and a steady hand!"

Pale, tearless, and collected, Cerise obeyed. Her mother, drawing the weapons from their case, wiped them with her delicate handkerchief, and proceeded to charge them carefully, and with a preoccupied air, like a mother preparing medicine for a child. Holding the ramrod between her beautiful white teeth, while her delicate and jewelled fingers shook the powder into the pan, she explained to Cerise the whole mystery of loading and priming the deadly weapons. She would thus, as she observed, always have one barrel in reserve. The younger woman listened attentively. Her lip was steady, though her hand shook, and now that the worst was come she showed that peculiar quality of race which is superior to the common fighting courage possessed indiscriminately by all classes—the passive concentrated firmness, which can take every advantage so long as a chance is left, and die without a word at last, when hope gives place to the resignation of despair.

She even pointed out to her mother, that by half closing the shutter, the Marquise, herself unseen, could command the approach to the front door. Then taking a crucifix from her bosom, she

pressed it to her lips, and said, "I am ready now, mamma. I am calm. I can do anything you tell me. Kiss me once more, dear, as you used when I was a child. And if we *must* die, it will not seem so hard to die together."

The Marquise answered by a long clinging embrace, and then the two women sat them down in the gloomy shadows of their chamber, haggard, tearless, silent, watching for the near approach of a merciless enemy armed with horrors worse than death.



CHAPTER XVI.

AT BAY.

IN obedience to his mistress, Bartoletti had endeavoured to secure the few weak fastenings of the house, but his hands shook so, that without Fleurette's aid not a bolt would have been pushed nor a key turned. The black girl, however, seconded his efforts with skill and coolness, so that Hippolyte's summons to surrender was addressed to locked doors and closed windows. The Coromantee was now so inflamed with rum as to be capable of any outrage, and since neither his band nor himself were possessed of fire-arms, nothing but Célandine's happy suggestion about the concealed powder restrained him from ordering a few faggots to be cut, and the building set in a blaze. Advancing

with an air of dignity, that would at any other time have been ludicrous, and which he would certainly have abandoned had he known that the Marquise covered his body with her pistol the while, he thumped the door angrily, and demanded to know why "dis here gentleman comin' to pay compliment to buckra miss," was not immediately admitted; but receiving no answer, proceeded at once to batter the panels with an iron crowbar, undeterred by the expostulations of Fleurette, who protested vehemently, first, that her mistress was engaged with a large party of French officers; secondly, that she lay sick in bed, on no account to be disturbed; and lastly, that neither she nor ma'amselle were in the house at all.

The Coromantee of course knew better. Shouting a horrible oath, and a yet more hideous threat, he applied his burly shoulders to the entrance, and the whole wood-work giving way with a crash, precipitated himself into the passage, followed by the rest of the band, to be confronted by Fleurette alone, Bartoletti having fled ignominiously to the kitchen.

"I could have hit him through the neck," observed the Marquise, withdrawing from her post behind the shutter, "but I was too directly above

him to make sure, and every charge is so valuable I would not waste one on a mere wound. My darling, I still hope that two or three deadly shots may intimidate them, and we shall escape after all."

Cerise answered nothing, though her lips moved. The two ladies listened, with every faculty sharpened, every nerve strung to the utmost.

A scream from Fleurette thrilled through them like a blow. Hippolyte, though willing enough to dally with the comely black girl for a minute or two, lost patience with her pertinacity in clinging about him to delay his entrance, and struck her brutally to the ground. Turning fiercely on him where she lay, she made her sharp teeth meet in the fleshy part of his leg, an injury the savage returned with a kick, that after the first shriek it elicited left poor Fleurette stunned and moaning in the corner of the passage, to be crushed and trampled by the blacks, who now poured in behind their leader, elated with the success of this, their first step in open rebellion.

Presently, loud shouts, or rather howls of triumph, announced that the overseer's place of concealment was discovered. Bartoletti, pale or rather yellow, limp, stammering, and beside himself with terror, was dragged out of the house and

consigned to sundry ferocious looking negroes, who proceeded to amuse themselves by alternately kicking, cuffing, and threatening him with instantaneous death.

The Marquise listened eagerly; horror, pity, and disgust succeeding each other on her haughty, resolute face. Once, something like contempt swept over it, while she caught the tone of Bartolletti's abject entreaties for mercy. He only asked for life—bare life, nothing more; they might make a slave of him then and there. He was their property, he and his wife, and all that he had, to do what they liked with. Only let him live, he said, and he would join them heart and hand; show them where the rum was kept, the money, the jewels; nay, help them cheerfully to cut every white throat on the island. The man was convulsed with terror, and the negroes danced round like fiends, mocking, jeering, flouting him, exulting in the spectacle of a buckra overseer brought so low.

"There is something in *race* after all," observed the Marquise, as if discussing an abstract proposition. "I suppose it is only the canaille that can thus degrade themselves from mere dread of death. Though our families have not always

lived very decently, I am glad to think that there was never yet a Montmirail or La Fierté who did not know how *to die*. My child, it is the pure old blood that carries us through such moments as these ; neither of us are likely to disgrace it now."

Again her daughter's lips moved, although no sound escaped them. Cerise was prepared to die, but she could not bring herself to reason on the advantages of noble birth at such a moment, like the Marquise ; and indeed the girl's weaker frame and softer heart quailed in terror at the prospect of the ordeal they had to go through.

From their chamber of refuge the two ladies could hear the insulting jests and ribald gibberish of the slaves, now bursting into the sitting-room, breaking the furniture, shivering the mirrors, and wantonly destroying all the delicate articles of use and ornament, of which they could neither understand the purpose nor appreciate the value. Presently a discordant scream from Pierrot announced that the parrot had protested against the intrusion of these riotous visitors, while a shout of pain, followed by loud bursts of laughter, proclaimed the manner in which he had resented the familiarity of one more daring than the rest. Taking the bird roughly off its perch, a stout young negro named

Achille had been bitten to the bone, and the cross-cut wound inflicted by the parrot's beak so roused his savage nature, that twisting its neck round with a vindictive howl, he slew poor Pierrot on the spot.

The Marquise in her chamber above could hear the brutal acclamations that greeted this exploit, and distinguished the smothered thump of her favourite's feathered body as it was dashed into a corner of the room.

Then her lips set tight, her brows knit, and the white hand clenched itself round her pistol, firm, rigid, and pitiless as marble.

Heavy footsteps were now heard hurrying on the stairs, and whispered voices urging contrary directions, but all with the same purport. There seemed to be no thought of compassion, no talk of mercy. Even within hearing of their victims, Hippolyte and Achille, who was his second in command, scrupled not to discuss the fate of the ladies when they should have gained possession of their persons—a fate which turned the daughter's blood to ice, the mother's to fire. It was no time now to think of compromise or capitulation, or aught but selling life at the dearest, and gaining every moment possible by the sacrifice of an enemy.

Even in this last extremity, however, the genius of system, so remarkable in all French minds, did not desert the Marquise. She counted the charges in her pistol-case, and calculated the resources of her foes with a cool, methodical appreciation of the chances for and against her, totally unaffected by the enormous disproportion of the odds. She was good, she argued, for a dozen shots in all. She would allow for two misses; sagely reflecting that in a chance medley like the present she could hardly preserve a steadiness of hand and eye that had heretofore so discomfited Madame de Sabran in the shooting galleries of Marly and Versailles. Eight shots would then be left, exclusive of two that she determined at all risks to reserve for the last. The dead bodies of eight negroes she considered, slain by the hand of one white woman, ought to put the whole black population of the island to the rout; but supposing that the rum they had drunk should have rendered them so reckless as to disregard even such a warning, and that, with her defences broke down, she found herself and daughter at their mercy, then—and while the Marquise reasoned thus, the blood mounted to her eyes, and a hand of ice seemed to close round her heart—the two reserve shots should be directed with

unerring hand, the one into her daughter's bosom, the other through her own.

And Cerise, now that the crisis had arrived at last, in so far as they were to be substantiated by the enforced composure of a passive endurance, fully vindicated her claims to noble blood. She muttered many a prayer indeed, that arose straight from her heart, but her eyes were fixed on her mother the while, and she had disposed the ammunition on a chair beside her in such a manner as to reload for the Marquise with rapidity and precision. "We are like a front and rear rank of the Grey Musketeers," said the latter, with a wild attempt at hilarity, in which a strong hysterical tendency, born of overwrought feelings, was with difficulty kept down. "The affair will soon commence now, and, my child, if worst comes to worst, remember there is no surrender. I hear them advancing to the assault. Courage! my darling. Steady! and *Vive la France!*"

The words were still upon her lips, when a swarm of negroes, crowding and shouldering up the narrow passage, halted at her door. Hippolyte commenced his summons to the besieged by a smashing blow with the crowbar, that splintered one of the panels and set the whole wood-work

quivering to its hinges. Then he applied his thick lips to the keyhole, and shouted in brutal glee—

“Time to wake up now, missee! You play ’possum no longer, else cut down gum-tree at one stroke. Wot you say to dis nigger for buckra bridegroom? Time to come out now and dance jigs at um wedding.”

There was not a quiver in her voice while the Marquise answered in cold imperious tones—

“You are running up a heavy reckoning for this night’s work. I know your ringleaders, and refuse to treat with them. Nevertheless, I am not a severe mistress. If the rest of the negroes will go quietly home, and resume their duties with to-morrow’s sunrise, I will not be hard upon *them*. You know me, and can trust my word.”

Cheers of derision answered this haughty appeal, and loud suggestions for every kind of cruelty and insult, to be inflicted on the two ladies, were heard bandied about amongst the slaves. Hippolyte replied fiercely—

“Give in at once! Open this minute, or neither of you shall leave the house alive! For the Marquise—Achille! I give her to you! For lily ma’amselle—I marry her this very night. See! before the moon goes down!”

Cerise raised her head in scornful defiance. Her face was livid, but it was stamped with the same expression as her mother's now. There could be no question both were prepared to die game to the last.

The blows of Hippolyte's crowbar resounded against the strong oaken panels of the door, but the massive wood-work, though it shook and groaned, resisted stoutly for a time. It was well for the inmates that Célandine's imaginative powers had suggested the concealed gunpowder. Had it not been for their fears of an explosion the negroes would ere this have set fire to the building, when no amount of resistance could have longer delayed the fate of the two ladies. Bartolletti, intimidated by the threats of his captors, and preoccupied only with the preservation of his own life, had shown the insurgents where the rum was kept, and many of these were rapidly passing from the reckless to the stupefied stage of intoxication. The Italian, who was not deficient in cunning, encouraged their potations with all his might. He thus hoped to elude them before morning, and leaving his employers to their fate, reach Port Welcome in safety; where he doubted not he should be met by Célandine, whose influence as an

Obi-woman, he rightly conjectured, would be sufficient to insure her safety. A coward rarely meets with the fate he deserves, and Bartoletti did indeed make his eventual escape in the manner he had proposed.

Plying his crowbar with vigorous strokes, Hippolyte succeeded at length in breaking through one of the door panels, a measure to be succeeded by the insertion of hand and arm for withdrawal of the bolts fastened on the inside. The Coromantee possessed, however, a considerable share of cunning mixed with the fierce cruelty of a savage. When he had torn away enough woodwork to make a considerable aperture, he turned to his lieutenant and desired him to introduce his body and unbar the door from within. It is difficult to say what he feared, since even had he been aware that his mistress possessed firearms, he could not have conceived the possibility of her using them so recklessly in a house that he had reason to believe was stored with powder. It was probably some latent dread of the white race that prompted his command to his subordinate. "You peep in, you black nigger. Ladies all in full dress now. Bow-ticks rosined and fiddlers dry. Open um door, and ask polite company to walk in."

Thus adjured, Achille thrust his woolly head and half his shining black body through the aperture. Madame de Montmirail, standing before her daughter, was not five paces off. She raised her white arm slowly, and covered him with steady aim. Ere his large thick hand had closed round the bolt for which it groped, there was a flash, a loud report, a cloud of smoke curling round the toilet accessories of a lady's bedchamber, and Achille, shot through the brain, fell back stone dead into the passage.

"A little lighter charge of powder, my dear," said the Marquise, giving the smoking weapon to her daughter to be reloaded, while she poised its fellow carefully in her hand. "I sighted him *very* fine, and was a trifle over my mark even then. These pistols always throw high at so short a distance."

Then she placed herself in readiness for another enemy, and during a short space waited in vain.

The report of her pistol had been followed by a general scramble of the negroes, who tumbled precipitately downstairs, and in some cases even out of the house, under the impression that every succeeding moment might find them all blown into the air. But the very cause of the besiegers' panic

proved, when their alarm subsided, of the utmost detriment to the garrison. Hippolyte, finding himself still in possession of his limbs and faculties, on the same side of the Sulphur Mountain as before, argued, reasonably enough, that the concealed powder was a delusion, and with considerable promptitude at once set fire to the lower part of the house ; after which, once more mustering his followers, and encouraging them by his example, he ascended the staircase, and betaking himself to the crowbar with a will, soon battered in the weak defence that alone stood between the ladies and their savage enemies.

Cerise had loaded her mother's pistol to perfection ; that mother, roused out of all thought of self by her child's danger, was even now reckoning the last frail chance by which her daughter might escape. During the short respite afforded by the panic of the negroes they had dragged with desperate strength a heavy chest of drawers, and placed it across the doorway. Even when the latter was forced, this slight breastwork afforded an additional impediment to the assailants.

"You must drop from the window, my child," whispered the Marquise, when the shattered door fell in at length across this last obstruction, reveal-

ing a hideous confusion of black forms, and rolling eyes, and grinning fiendish faces. "It is not a dozen feet, but mind you turn round so as to light on your hands and knees. Célandine *must* be outside. If you can reach her you are safe. Adieu, darling! I can keep the two foremost from following you, still!"

The Marquise grasped a pistol in each hand, but she bent her brow—the haughty white brow that had never been carried more proudly than now—towards her child, and the girl's pale lips clung to it lovingly, while she vowed that neither life nor death should part her from her mother.

"It is all over, dear," she said, calmly. "We can but die together as we have lived."

Their case was indeed desperate. The room was already darkening with smoke, and the wood-work on the floor below crackling in the flames that began to light up the lawn outside, and tip with saffron the sleeping woods beyond. The door was broken in; the chest of drawers gave way with a loud crash, and brandishing his crow-bar, Hippolyte leaped into the apartment like a fiend, but stood for an instant aghast, rigid, like that fiend turned to bronze, because the white lady, shielding her daughter with her body, neither

quailed nor flinched. Her eye was bright, her colour raised, her lips set, her hand steady, her whole attitude resolute and defiant. All this he took in at a glance, and the Coromantee felt his craven heart shrink up to nothing in his breast, thus covered by the deadly pistol of the Marquise.



CHAPTER XVII.

JUST IN TIME.



MOMENTS are precious at such a time. The negro, goaded by shame, rage, and alcohol, had drawn his breath for a spring, when a loud cheer was heard outside, followed by two or three dropping shots, and the ring of a hearty English voice exclaiming--

“Hold on, mates! Don’t ye shoot wild a’cause of the ladies. It’s yardarm to yardarm, this spell, and we’ll give these here black devils a taste of the naked steel!”

In another moment Slap-Jack was in the passage, leaving a couple of wounded ruffians on the stairs to be finished by his comrades, and cutting another down across the very door-sill of the Marquise’s bedchamber. Ere he could enter it,

however, his captain had dashed past him, leaping like a panther over the dead negroes under foot, and flashing his glittering rapier in the astonished eyes of the Coromantee, who turned round bewildered from his prey to fight with the mad energy of despair.

In vain. Of what avail was the massive iron crowbar, wielded even by the strength of a Hercules, against the deadliest blade but one in the Great Monarch's body-guard?

A couple of dazzling passes, that seemed to go over, under, all round the clumsier weapon—a stamp—a muttered oath, shut in by clenched, determined teeth, and the elastic steel shot through Hippolyte's very heart, and out on the other side.

Spurning the huge black body with his foot, Captain George withdrew his sword, wiped it grimly on the dead man's woolly head, and, uncovering, turned to the ladies with a polite apology for thus intruding under the pressure of so disagreeable a necessity.

He had scarcely framed a sentence ere he became deadly pale, and began to stammer, as if he, too, was under the influence of some engrossing and incontrollable emotion.

The two women had shrunk into the farthest corner of the room. With the prospect of a rescue, Madame de Montmirail's nerves, strung to their utmost tension, had completely given way. In a state of mental and bodily prostration, she had laid her head in the lap of Cerise, whose courage, being of a more passive nature, did not now fail her so entirely.

The girl, indeed, pushing her hair back from her temples, looked wildly in George's face for an instant, like one who wakes from a dream ; but the next, her whole countenance lit up with delight, and holding out both hands to him, she exclaimed, in accents of irrepressible tenderness and self-abandonment, "*C'est toi !*" Then the pale face flushed crimson, and the loving eyes drooped beneath his own. To him she had always been beautiful—most beautiful, perhaps, in his dreams—but never in dreams nor in waking reality so beautiful as now.

He gazed on her entranced, motionless, forgetful of everything in the world but that one loved being restored, as it seemed, by a miracle, at the very time when she had been most lost to him. His stout heart, thrilling to its core from her glance, quailed to think of what must have be-

fallen had he arrived a minute too late, and a prayer went up from it of hearty humble thanksgiving that he was in time. He saw nothing but that drooping form in its delicate white dress, with its gentle feminine gestures and rich dishevelled hair; heard nothing but the accents of that well-remembered voice vibrating with the love that he felt was deep and tender as his own. He was unconscious of the cheers of his victorious boat's crew, of the groans and shrieks uttered by wounded or routed negroes, of the dead beneath his feet, the blazing rafters overhead, the showers of sparks and rolling clouds of smoke that already filled the house; unconscious even of Madame de Montmirail's recovery from her stupor, as she too recognized him, and raising herself with an effort from her daughter's embrace, muttered in deep passionate tones, "*C'est lui!*"

But it was no time for the exchanges of ceremonious politeness, or the indulgence of softer emotions. The house was fairly on fire, the negroes were up in arms all over the island. A boat's crew, however sturdy, is but a handful of men, and courage becomes foolhardy when it opposes itself voluntarily at odds of one against a score. Slap-Jack was the first to speak. "Askin' your

pardon, ladies," said he, with seamanlike deference to the sex; "the sooner we can clear out of this here the better. If you'll have the kindness to point out your sea-chests, and possibles, and such like, Bottle-Jack here, he'll be answerable for their safety, and me an' my mates we'll run you both down to the beach and have you aboard in a pig's whisper. The island's getting hot, miss," he added confidentially to Cerise, who did not the least understand him. "In these low latitudes, a house afire and a hundred of blacks means a bobbery, just as sure as at home four old women and a goose makes a market!"

"He is right," observed the Captain, who had now recovered his presence of mind. "From what I saw as I came along, I fear there is a general rising of the slaves through the whole island. My brigantine, I need not say, is at the disposal of madame and mademoiselle (Cerise thanked him with a look), and I believe that for a time at least it will be the only safe place of refuge."

Thus speaking, he offered his hand to conduct the Marquise from the apartment, with as much courtliness and ceremony as though they had been about to dance a minuet at Versailles, under the

critical eye of the late king. Hers trembled violently as she yielded it. That hand, so steady but a few minutes ago, while levelling its deadly weapon against the leader of a hundred enemies, now shook as if palsied. How little men understand women. He attributed her discomposure entirely to fright.

There is a second nature, an acquired instinct in the habits of good-breeding, irrepressible even by the gravest emergency. Captain George, conducting Madame de Montmirail down her own blazing staircase, behaved with as ceremonious a politeness as if they had been descending in accordance with etiquette to a formal dinner-party. Cerise, following close, hung no doubt on every word that came from his lips, but it must be confessed the conversation was somewhat frivolous for so important a juncture.

“I little thought,” said the Captain, performing another courtly bow, “that it was Madame la Marquise whom I should have the honour of escorting to-night out of this unpleasant little fracas. Had I known madame was on the island, she will believe that I should have come ashore and paid my respects to her much sooner.”

“You could not have arrived at a more oppor-

tune moment, monsieur," answered the lady, whose strong physical energy and habitual presence of mind were now rapidly reasserting themselves. "You have always been welcome to my receptions; never more so than to-night. You found it a little hot, I fear, and a good deal crowded. The latter disadvantage I was remedying, to the best of my abilities, when you announced yourself. The society, too, was hardly so polite as I could have wished. Oh, monsieur!" she added, in a changed and trembling voice, suddenly discarding the tone of banter she had assumed, "where should we have been now, and what must have become of us, but for you? *You*, to whom we had rather owe our lives than to any man in the world!"

He was thinking of Cerise. He accepted the kind words gratefully, happily; but, like all generous minds, he made light of the service he had rendered.

"You are too good to say so, madame," was his answer. "It seemed to me you were making a gallant defence enough when I came in. One man had already fallen before your aim, and I would not have given much for the life of that ugly giant whom I took the liberty of running

through the body without asking permission, although he is probably, like myself, a slave of your own."

The Marquise laughed. "Confess, monsieur," said she, "that I have a steady hand on the pistol. Do you know, I never shot at anything but a playing-card till to-night. It is horrible to kill a man, too. It makes me shudder when I think of it. And yet, at the moment, I had no pity, no scruples—I can even imagine that I experienced something of the wild excitement which makes a soldier's trade so fascinating. I hope it is not so; I trust I may not be so cruel—so unwomanly. But you talk of slaves. Are we not yours? Yours by every right of conquest; to serve and tend you, and follow you all over the world. Ah! it would be a happy lot for her who knew its value!"

The last sentence she spoke in a low whisper and an altered tone, as if to herself. It either escaped him or he affected not to hear.

By this time they were out of the house, and standing on the lawn to windward of the flames, which leaped and flickered from every quarter of the building; nor, in escaping from the conflagration, had they by any means yet placed themselves

in safety. Captain George and the three trusty Jacks, with half a dozen more stout seamen, constituting a boat's crew, had indeed rescued the ladies, for the moment, from a hideous alternative ; but it was more than doubtful, if even protected by so brave an escort, they could reach the shore unmolested. Bands of negroes, ready to commit every enormity, were ere now patrolling all parts of the island. It was too probable that the few white inhabitants had been already massacred, or, if still alive, would have enough to do to make terms for themselves with the infuriated slaves.

A slender garrison occupied a solitary fort on the other side of the mountains, but so small a force might easily be overmastered, and even if they had started on the march it was impossible they could arrive for several hours in the vicinity of Port Welcome. By that time the town might well be burned to the ground, and George, who was accustomed to reason with rapidity on the chances and combinations of warfare, thought it by no means unlikely that the ruddy glare, fleeting and wavering on the night-sky over the blazing roof of Montmirail West, might be accepted as a signal for immediate action by the whole of the insurgents.

Hippolyte had laid his plans with considerable

forethought, the result, perhaps, of many a crafty war-path—many a savage foray in his own wild home. He had so disposed the negroes under his immediate orders, that Madame de Montmirail's house was completely surrounded in every direction by which escape seemed possible. The different egresses leading to the huts, the mills, the cane-pieces, were all occupied, and a strong force was posted on the high road to Port Welcome, chiefly with a view to prevent the arrival of assistance from that quarter. One only path was left unguarded ; it was narrow, tangled, difficult to find, and wound up through the jungle, across the wildest part of the mountain.

By this route he had probably intended to carry off Mademoiselle de Montmirail to some secure fastness of his own. Not satisfied with the personal arrangements he had made for burning the house and capturing the inmates, he had also warned his confederates, men equally fierce and turbulent, if of less intelligence than his own, that they should hold themselves in readiness to take up arms the instant they beheld a glare upon the sky above Cash-a-crou ; that each should then despatch a chosen band of twenty stout negroes to himself for orders ; and that the rest of their forces

should at once commence the work of devastation on their own account, burning, plundering, rioting, and cutting all white throats, without distinction of age or sex.

That this wholesale butchery failed in its details was owing to no fault of conception, no scruples of humanity on the part of its organizer. The execution fell short of the original design simply because confided to several different heads, acted on by various interests, and all more or less bemused with rum. The ringleader had every reason to believe that if his directions were carried out he would find himself, ere sunrise, at the head of a general and successful revolt—a black emperor, perhaps, with a black population offering him a crown.

But this delusion had been dispelled by one thrust of Captain George's rapier, and the Coromantee's dark body lay charring amongst the glowing timbers of Madame de Montmirail's bed-chamber.

The dispositions that he had made, however, accounted for the large force of negroes now converging on the burning house. Their shouts might be heard echoing through the woods in all directions. When George had collected his men, surrounded the two ladies by a trusty escort of

blue-jackets, and withdrawn his little company, consisting but of a dozen persons, under cover of the trees, he held a council of war as to the best means for securing a rapid retreat. Truth to tell, the skipper would willingly have given the whole worth of her cargo to be once more on her deck, or even under the guns of 'The Bashful Maid.'

Slap-Jack gave his opinion unasked.

"Up foresail," said he, with characteristic impetuosity; "run out the guns—double-shotted and depressed; sport every rag of bunting; close in round the convoy; get plenty of way on, and run clean through, exchanging broadsides as we go ahead!"

But Smoke-Jack treated the suggestion with contempt.

"That's wot I call rough-and-tumble fighting, your honour," he grumbled, with a sheepish glance at the ladies; for with all his boasted knowledge of their sex, he was unaccustomed to such specimens as these, and discomfited, as he admitted to himself, by the "trim on 'em." "Them's not games as is fitting for such a company as this here, if I may make so bold. No, no, your honour, it's good advice to keep to windward of a nigger, and it's

my opinion as we should weather them on this here tack; get down to the beach with a long leg and a short one—half a mile and more below the town—fire three shots, as agreed on, for the boat, and so pull the ladies aboard on the quiet. After that, we might come ashore again, d'ye see, and have it out comfortable. What say *you*, Bottle-Jack?"

That worthy turned his quid, and looked preternaturally wise; the more so that the question was somewhat unexpected. He was all for keeping the ladies safe, he decided, now they had got them. Captain Kidd always did so, he remembered, and Captain Kidd could sail a ship and fight a ship, &c.; but Bottle-Jack was more incoherent than usual—utterly adrift under the novelty of his situation, and gasping like a gudgeon at the Marquise and her daughter, whose beauty seemed literally to take away his breath.

George soon made up his mind.

"Is there any way to the beach," said he, addressing himself rather to Cerise than her mother, "without touching the road to Port Welcome? It seemed to me, as we marched up, that the high road made a considerable bend. If we could take the string instead of the bow we might save

a good deal of time, and perhaps escape observation altogether."

The Marquise and her daughter looked at each other helplessly. Had they been Englishwomen, indeed, even in that hot climate, they would probably have known every by-road and mountain path within three leagues of their home; but the ladies of France, though they dance exquisitely, are not strong walkers, and neither of these, during the months they had spent at *Cash-a-crou*, had yet acquired such a knowledge of the locality as might now have proved the salvation of the whole party.

In this extremity a groan was heard to proceed out of the darkness at a few paces distance. Slap-Jack, guided by the sound, and parting some shrubs that concealed her, discovered poor Fleurette, more dead than alive, bruised, exhausted, terrified, scarcely able to stand, and shot through the ankle by a chance bullet from the blue-jackets, yet conscious enough still to drag herself to the feet of Cerise and cover them with kisses, forgetting everything else in her joy to find her young mistress still alive.

"You would serve me, Fleurette, I know," said Mademoiselle de Montmirail, in a cautious whisper;

for, to her excited imagination, every shrub that glistened in the moonlight held a savage. "I can trust you; I feel it. Tell me, is there no way to the sea but through our enemies? Must we witness more cruelties—more bloodshed? Oh! have we not had fighting and horrors enough?"

The black girl twined herself upwards, like a creeper, till her head was laid against the other's bosom; then she wept in silence for a few seconds ere she could command her voice to reply.

"Trust me, lily ma'amselle," said she, in a tone of intense feeling that vouched for her truth. "Trust poor Fleurette; give last drop of blood to help young missee safe. Go to Jumbo for lily ma'amselle now. Show um path safe across Sulphur Mountain down to sea-shore. Fleurette walk pretty well tank you, now, if only buckra blue-jacket offer um hand. Not so, sar! Impudent tief!" she added, indignantly, as Slap-Jack, thoroughly equal to the occasion, at once put his arm round her waist. "Keep your distance, sar! You only poor fore-topman. Dis good daddy help me along fust."

Thus speaking, she clung stoutly to Bottle-Jack, and proceeded to guide the party up the mountain along a path that she assured them was known but

to few of the negroes themselves, and avoided even by these, as being the resort of Jumbo and several other evil spirits much dreaded by the slaves. Of such supernatural terrors, she was good enough to inform them, they need have no fear, for that Jumbo and his satellites were fully occupied to-night in assisting the "bobbery" taking place all over the island ; and that even were they at leisure they would never approach a party in the centre of which was walking such an angel of light as Ma'amselle Cerise.



CHAPTER XVIII.

MÈRE AVANT TOUT.

THE path was steep and narrow, leading them, moreover, through the most tangled and inaccessible parts of the jungle. Their progress was necessarily tardy and laborious. Fleurette took the lead, supported by Bottle-Jack, whose sea-legs seemed to carry him up-hill with difficulty, and who stopped to take breath more than once. The black girl's wound was painful enough, but she possessed that savage spirit of endurance which successfully resists mere bodily suffering, and walked with an active and elastic, though limping step. Blood, however, was still oozing from her wound, and a sense of faintness, resisted by sheer force of will, threatened at every moment to overpower her. She might

just reach the crest of the hill, she thought, and then it would be all over with poor Fleurette ; but the rest would need no guide after that point was gained, and the faithful girl struggled on.

Next came Smoke-Jack, in attendance on the ladies, much exhilarated by the dignity of his position, yet ludicrously on his good behaviour, and afraid of committing himself, on the score of manners, by word or deed. The Marquise and her daughter walked hand in hand, wasting few words, and busied each with her own thoughts. They seemed to have exchanged characters with the events of the last few hours. Cerise, ever since her rescue, had displayed an amount of energy and resolution scarcely to be expected from her usual demeanour, making light of present fatigue and coming peril in a true military spirit of gaiety and good-humour ; while her mother, on the contrary, betrayed in every word and gesture the languor of subdued emotion, and a certain softened, saddened preoccupation of manner, seldom to be remarked in the self-possessed and brilliant Marquise.

Captain George, with Slap-Jack and the rest of the blue-jackets, brought up the rear. His fighting experience warned him that in no previous cam-

paign had he ever found himself in so critical a position as at present. He was completely surrounded by the enemy. His own force, though well-armed and full of confidence, was ridiculously weak in numbers. He was encumbered with baggage (not to speak it disrespectfully) that must be protected at any sacrifice, and he had to make a forced march, through ground of which he was ignorant, dependent on the guidance of a half-savage girl, who might after all turn out to be a traitress.

Under so many disadvantages, the former captain of Musketeers showed that he had not forgotten his early training. All eyes and ears, he seemed to be everywhere at once, anticipating emergencies, multiplying precautions, yet finding a moment every now and then for a word of politeness and encouragement to the ladies, to regret the roughness of the path, to excuse the prospective discomforts of the brigantine, or to assure them of their speedy arrival in a place of safety. On these occasions he invariably directed his speech to the Marquise and his looks to her daughter.

Presently, as they continued to wind up the hill, the ascent grew more precipitous. At length, having crossed the bed of a rivulet that they

could hear tumbling into a cascade many hundred feet below, they reached a pass on the mountain side where the path became level, but seemed so narrow as to preclude farther progress. It turned at a sharp angle round the bare face of a cliff, which rose on one side sheer and perpendicular several fathoms above their heads, and on the other shelved as abruptly into a dark abyss, the depth of which, not one even of the seamen, accustomed as they were to giddy heights, dared measure with his eye. Fleurette alone, standing on the brink, peered into it without wavering, and pointing downwards, looked back on the little party with triumph.

“See down there,” said she, in a voice that grew fainter with every syllable. “No road round up above; no road round down below. Once past here all safe, same as in bed at home. Come by, you! take hands one by one—so—small piece more—find white lagoon. All done then. Good-night!”

Holding each other by the hand, the whole party, to use Slap-Jack’s expression, “rounded the point” in safety. They now found themselves in an open and nearly flat space, encircled but unshadowed by the jungle. Below them,

over a level of black tree 'tops, the friendly sea was shining in the moonlight; and nearer yet, a gleam through the dark mass of forest denoted that white lagoon of which Fleurette had spoken.

On any other night it would have been a peaceful and a lovely sight; but now a flickering glare on the sky showed them where the roof-tree of Montmirail West was burning into ashes, and the 'yells of the rioters could be heard, plainer and plainer, as they scoured the mountain in pursuit of the fugitives, encouraging each other in their search.

Some of these shouts sounded so near in the clear still night, that Captain George was of opinion their track had been already discovered and followed up. If this were indeed the case, no stand could be made so effectually as at the defile they had lately threaded, and he determined to defend it to the last. For this purpose he halted his party and gave them their directions.

"Slap-Jack," said he, "I've got a bit of soldier's work for you to do. It's play to a sailor, but you attend to my orders all the same. If these black devils overhaul us, they can only

round that corner one at a time. I'll leave you with a couple of your own foretopmen here to stop *that* game. But we soldiers never want to fight without a support. Smoke-Jack and the rest of the boat's crew will remain at your back. What say ye, my lads? It will be something queer if you can't hold a hundred darkies and more in such a post as this, say, for three-quarters of an hour. I don't ask ye for a minute longer; but mind ye, I expect *that*, if not a man of you ever comes on board again. When you've killed all the niggers, make sail straight away to the beach, fire three shots, and I'll send a boat off. You won't want to break your leave after to-night's work. At all events, I wouldn't advise you to try, and I shall get the anchor up soon after sunrise. Bottle-Jack comes with me, in case the ladies should want more assistance, and this dark girl—what d'ye call her?—Fleurette, to show us the way. God bless ye, my lads! Keep steady, level low, and don't pull till you see the whites of their eyes!"

Bottle-Jack, slewing his body about with more than customary oscillation, declared his willingness to accompany the captain, but pointing to Fleurette, expressed a fear that "this here gal had got

a megrim or something, and wanted caulkin' very bad, if not refittin' altogether in dry dock."

The moon shed a strong light upon the little party, and it was obvious that Fleurette, who had now sunk to the ground, with her head supported by Bottle-Jack as tenderly and carefully as if the honest tar had been an experienced nurse of her own sex, was seriously, if not mortally wounded, and certainly unable to proceed. The Marquise and her daughter were at her side in an instant, but she took no heed of the former, fixing her filmy eyes on Cerise, and pressing her young mistress's hand to her heart.

"You kiss me once again," said she, faintly, and with a sad smile on her swarthy face, now turning to that wan leaden hue which makes a pale negro so ghastly an object. "Once again, so sweet! ma'amselle, same as before. You go straight on to white lagoon—see! Find canoe tied up. Stop here berry well, missee—Fleurette camp' out all night. No fear Jumbo now. Sleep on long after monkeys wake. Good-night!"

It was with difficulty that Cerise could be prevailed on to leave the faithful girl who had sacrificed herself so willingly, and whom, indeed, she could hardly expect to see again; but the

emergency admitted of no delay, even on the score of gratitude and womanly compassion. George hurried the ladies forward in the direction of the lagoon, leaving Fleurette, now prostrate and unconscious, to the care of Slap-Jack, who pitied her from the depths of his honest heart.

“It’s a bad job,” said he, taking off his jacket and folding it into a pillow for the poor girl’s head, with as much tender care as if she had been his own Alice, of whom indeed he was thinking at the moment. “A real bad job, if ever there was one. Such a heart of oak as this here ; an’ a likely lass too, though as black as a nor’-easter. Well, *somebody* ’ll have to pay for this night’s work, that’s sartin. Ay ! yell away, you black beggars. We’ll give you something to sing out for presently—an’ you shall have it hot and heavy when you *do* get it, as sure as my name’s Slap-Jack !”

Captain George in the mean time led the two ladies swiftly down the open space before them, in the direction of the lagoon, which was now in sight. They had but to thread one more belt of lofty forest trees, from which the wild vines hung in a profusion of graceful festoons, and they were on the brink of the cool, peaceful water, spread like a sheet of silver at their feet.

“Five minutes more,” said he, “and we are safe. Once across, and if that girl speaks truth, less than a quarter of a league will bring us to the beach. All seems quiet, too, on this side, and there is little chance of our being intercepted from the town. The boat will be in waiting within a cable’s length off shore, and my signal will bring her in at once. Then I shall hope to conduct you safe on board, but both madame and mademoiselle must excuse a sailor’s rough accommodation and a sailor’s unceremonious welcome.”

The Marquise did not immediately answer. She was looking far ahead into the distance, as though she heard not, or at least heeded not, and yet every tone of his voice was music to her ears, every syllable he spoke curdled like some sweet and subtle poison in her blood. Notwithstanding the severe fatigue and fierce excitement of the night, she walked with head erect, and proud imperious step, like a queen amongst her courtiers, or an enchantress in the circle she has drawn. There was a wild brilliancy in her eyes, there was a fixed red spot on either cheek; but for all her assumption of pride, for all her courage and all her self-command, her hand trembled, her breath came quick, and the Marquise knew that she had never

yet felt so thoroughly a weak and dependent woman as now, when she turned at last to thank her preserver for his noble efforts, and dared not even raise her eyes to meet his own.

“You have saved us, monsieur,” was all she could stammer out, “and how can we show our gratitude enough? We shall never forget the moment of supreme danger, nor the brave man who came between those ruffians and their prey. Shall we, Cerise?”

But Cerise made no answer, though she managed to convey her thanks in some hidden manner that afforded Captain George a satisfaction quite out of proportion to their value.

They had now reached the edge of the lagoon, to find, as Fleurette had indicated, a shallow rickety canoe, moored to a post half-buried in the water, worm-eaten, rotten, and crumbling to decay. The bark itself was in little better preservation, and on a near inspection they discovered, much to their discomfiture, that it would hold at best but one passenger at a time. It had evidently not been used for a considerable period, and after months of exposure and ill-usage, without repair, was indeed, as a means of crossing the lagoon, little better than so much brown paper. George’s heart sank while

he inspected it. There was no paddle, and although such a want might easily be remedied with a knife and the branch of a tree, every moment of delay seemed so dangerous, that the captain made up his mind to use another method of propulsion, and cross over at once.

“Madame,” said he to the Marquise, “our only safety is on the other side of this lagoon. Fifty strokes of a strong swimmer would take him there. No paddle has been left in that rickety little craft, nor dare I waste the few minutes it would take to fashion one. Moreover, neither mademoiselle nor yourself could use it, and you need only look at your shallop to be sure that it would never carry two. This, then, is what I propose. I will place one of you in the canoe, and swim across, pushing it before me. Bottle-Jack will remain here to guard the other. For that purpose I will leave him my pistols in addition to his own. When my first trip is safely accomplished, I will return with the canoe and repeat the experiment. The whole can be done in a short quarter of an hour. Excuse me, madame, but for this work I must divest myself of coat, cravat, and waistcoat.”

Thus speaking, Captain George disencumbered

himself rapidly of these garments, and assisted by Bottle-Jack, tilted the light vessel on its side, to get rid of its superfluous weight of water. Then standing waist-deep in the lagoon, he prepared it for the reception of its freight ; no easy matter with a craft of this description, little more roomy and substantial than a cockle-shell, without the advantage of being water-tight. Spreading his laced coat along the bottom of the canoe, he steadied it carefully against the bank, and signed to the ladies that all was now in readiness for embarkation.

They exchanged wistful looks. Neither seemed disposed to grasp at her own safety and leave the other in danger. Bottle-Jack, leaning over the canoe, continued baling the water out with his hand. Notwithstanding the captain's precautions it leaked fast, and seemed even now little calculated to land a passenger dry on the farther shore.

"Mamma, I *will* not leave you," said Cerise, "you shall go first with George. With monsieur, I mean." She corrected herself, blushing violently. "Monsieur can then return for me, and I shall be quite safe with this good old man, who is, you perceive, armed to the teeth, and as brave as a lion besides."

"That is why I do not fear to remain," returned

the Marquise. "Child, I could not bear to see this sheet of water between us, and you on the dangerous side. We can neither fly nor swim, alas! though the latter art we *might* have learned long ago. Cerise, I *insist* on your crossing first. It may be the last command I shall ever lay upon you."

But Cerise was still obstinate, and the canoe meanwhile filled fast, in spite of Bottle-Jack's exertions. That worthy, whose very nose was growing pale, though not with fear, took no heed of their dilemma, but continued his task with a mechanical, half-stupefied persistency, like a man under the influence of opium. The quick eye of the Marquise had detected this peculiarity of manner, and it made her the more determined not to leave her daughter under the old seaman's charge. Their dispute might have been protracted till even Captain George's courtesy would have given way; but a loud yell from the defile they had lately quitted, followed by a couple of shots and a round of British cheers, warned them all that not a moment was to be lost, for that their retreat was even now dependent on the handful of brave men left behind to guard the pass.

"My daughter shall go first, monsieur? Is it not so?" exclaimed the Marquise, with an eager-

ness of eye and excitement of manner she had not betrayed in all the previous horrors of the night.

“It is better,” answered George. “Mademoiselle is perhaps somewhat the lightest.” And although he strove to make his voice utterly unmoved and indifferent, there was in its tone a something of intense relief, of deep, heartfelt joy, that told its own tale.

The Marquise knew it all at last. She saw the past now, not piece by piece, in broken detail as it had gone by, but all at once, as the mariner, sailing out of a fogbank, beholds the sunny sky, and the blue sea, and the purple outlines of the shore. It came upon her as a shot goes through a wild deer. The creature turns sick and faint, and knowing all is over, yet would fain ignore its hurt and keep its place, erect, stately, and uncomplaining, amongst the herd; not the less surely has it got its death-wound.

How carefully he placed Ceresse in the frail bark of which she was to be the sole occupant. How tenderly he drew the laced coat between the skirt of her delicate white dress and the flimsy shattered wood-work, worn, splintered, and dripping wet even now. Notwithstanding the haste required, notwithstanding that every moment was

of such importance in this life-and-death voyage, how he seemed to linger over the preparations that brought him into contact with his precious freight. At last they were ready. A farewell embrace between mother and daughter; a husky cheer delivered in a whisper from Bottle-Jack; a hurried thanksgiving for perils left behind; an anxious glance at the opposite shore, and the canoe floated off with its burden, guided by George, who in a few yards was out of his depth and swimming onward in long measured strokes that pushed it steadily before him.

The Marquise, watching their progress with eager restless glance, that betrayed strong passions and feelings kept down by a stronger will, observed that when within a pistol-shot of the opposite shore the bark was propelled swiftly through the water, as if the swimmer exerted himself to the utmost—so much so as to drive it violently against the bank. George's voice, while his dripping figure emerged into sight, warned her that all was well; but straining her eyes in the uncertain light, the Marquise, though she discerned her daughter's white dress plainly enough, could see nothing of the boat. Again George shouted, but she failed to make out the purport of what he said; though

a gleam of intelligence on the old seaman's face made her turn to Bottle-Jack. "What is it?" she asked, anxiously. "Why does he not come back to us with the canoe?"

"The canoe will make no more voyages, my lady," answered the old man, with a grim leer that had in it less of mirth than pain. "She's foundered, that's wot she's been an' done. They'll send back for us, never fear; so you an' me will keep watch and watch till they come; an' if you please, my lady, askin' your pardon, I'll keep *my* watch first."



CHAPTER XIX.

ALL ADRIFT.



THE Marquise scarcely heard him. She was intent on those two figures scrambling up the opposite shore, and fast disappearing into the darkness beyond. It seemed that the darkness was closing in around herself, never again to be dispelled. When those were gone what was there left on earth for *her*? She had lost Cerise, she told herself, the treasure she had guarded so carefully; the darling for whom she would have sacrificed her life a thousand times, as the events of the last few hours proved; the one aim and object of her whole existence, without which she was alone in the world. And now this man had come and taken her child away, and it would never be the same

thing again. Cerise loved him, she was sure of that. Ah! they could not deceive *her*; and he loved Cerise. She knew it by his voice in those few words when he suggested that the girl should cross the water first. The Marquise twined her fingers together, as if she was in pain.

They must be safe now. Walking side by side on the peaceful beach, waiting for the boat that should bear them away, would they forget all about her in the selfishness of their new-found happiness, and leave her to perish here? She wished they would. She wished the rioters, coming on in overwhelming numbers, might force the pass and drive these honest blue-jackets in before them to make a last desperate stand at the water's edge. She could welcome death then, offering herself willingly to insure the safety of those two.

And what was this man to her that she should give him up her daughter, that she should be ready to give up her life rather than endanger his happiness? She winced, she quivered with pain and shame because of the feelings her own question called up. What was he to her? The noblest, the dearest, the bravest, the best-beloved; the realization of her girl's dreams, of her woman's

passions, the type of all that she had ever honoured and admired and longed for to make her happiness complete! She remembered so well the boy's gentle brow, the frank kind eyes that smiled and danced with delight to be noticed by her, a young and beautiful widow, flattered and coveted of all the Great King's Court. She recalled, as if it were but yesterday, the stag-hunt at Fontainebleau; the manly figure and the daring horsemanship of the Grey Musketeer; her own mad joy in that wild gallop, and the strange keen zest life seemed to have acquired when she rode home through those sleeping woods, under the dusky purple of that soft autumnal night. How she used to watch for him afterwards, amidst all the turmoil of feasts and pleasures that constituted the routine of the new Court. How well she knew his place of ceremony, his turn of duty, and loved the very sentries at the palace-gate for his sake. Often had she longed to hint by a look, a gesture, the flirt of a fan, the dropping of a flower, that he had not far to seek for one who would care for him as he deserved; but even the Marquise shrank, and feared, and hesitated, woman-like, where she really loved. Then came that ever-memorable night at the Masked Ball, when

she cried out loud, in her longing and her loneliness, and never knew afterwards whether she was glad or sorry for what she had done.

It was soon to be over then, for ere a few more days had elapsed the Regent ventured on his shameless outrage at the Hôtel Montmirail, and lo ! in the height of her indignation and her need, who should drop down, as it seemed, from the skies, to be her champion, but the man of all others whom most she could have loved and trusted in the world !

Since then, had she not thought of him by day and dreamt of him by night, dwelling on his image with a fond persistency none the less cherished because saddened and desponding—content, if better might not be, to worship it in secret to the last, though she might never look on its original again ?

The real and the ideal had so acted on each other, that while he seemed to her the perfection of all manhood should be, that very type was unconsciously but a faithful copy of himself. In short, she loved him ; and when such a man is loved by such a woman it is usually but little conducive to his happiness, and thoroughly destructive of her own.

If I have mistaken the originator of so beautiful

and touching an illustration, I humbly beg his pardon, but I think it is Alphonse Karr who teaches, in his remarks on the great idolatry of all times and nations, that it is well to sow plenty of flowers in that prolific soil which is fertilized by the heart's sunshine and watered by its tears—plenty of flowers, the brighter, the sweeter, the more fragile, perhaps, the better. Winter may cut them down indeed to the cold earth, yet spring-time brings another crop as fair, as fresh, as fragile, and as easily replaced as those that bloomed before. But it is unwise to plant a tree ; *because, if that tree be once torn up by the roots, the flowers will never grow over the barren place again !*

The Marquise had not indeed *planted* the tree, but she had allowed it unwittingly to grow. Perhaps she would never have confessed its existence to herself had it not thus been forcibly torn away by roots that had for years twined deeper and deeper among all its gentlest and all its strongest feelings, till they had become as the very fibres of her heart.

It is needless to say that the Marquise was a woman elevated both by disposition and education above the meaner and pettier weaknesses of her sex. If she was masculine in her physical

courage and moral recklessness of consequences, she was masculine also in a certain generosity of spirit and noble disdain for anything like malice or foul play. Jealousy with her—and, like all strong natures, she could feel jealousy very keenly—would never be visited on the object that had caused it. She would hate and punish herself under the torture; she might even be goaded to hate and punish the man at whose hands she was suffering; but she would never have injured the woman whom he preferred, and, indeed, supported by a scornful pride, would have taken a strange morbid pleasure in enhancing her own pain by ministering to that woman's happiness.

Therefore she was saved a keen pang now. A pang that might have rendered her agony too terrible to endure. She had not concealed from herself to-night that the thrill of delight she experienced from the arrival of succour was due rather to the person who brought it than to the assistance itself; but almost ere she had time to realize its charm the illusion had been dispelled, and she felt that, dream as it all was, she had been wakened ere she had time to dream it out.

And now it seemed to her that nothing would be so good as the excitement of another skirmish,

another struggle, and a sudden death, with the cheers of these brave Englishmen ringing in her ears. A death that Cerise would never forget had been encountered for her safety, that *he* would sometimes remember, and remembering, accord a smile and a sigh to the beauty he had neglected, and the devotion he had never known till too late.

Engrossed with such thoughts, the Marquise was less alive than usual to surrounding impressions. Presently a deep groan, forced from her companion by combined pain and weakness, against which the sufferer could no longer hold out, roused her to a sense of her situation, which was indeed sufficiently precarious to have warranted much anxiety and alarm.

Hastening to his side, she was shocked to perceive that Bottle-Jack had sunk to the ground, and was now endeavouring ineffectually to support himself on his knees in an attitude of vigilance and defence. The Captain's pistols lay beside him, and he carried his own in each hand, but his glazing eye and fading colour showed that the weapons could be but of little service, and the time seemed fast approaching when the old sailor should be relieved from his duty by an order against which there was no appeal.

The Marquise had scarcely listened to the words while he spoke them, but they came back now, and she understood what he meant when he told her that, if she pleased, "he would keep *his* watch first."

She looked around and shuddered. It was, indeed, a cheerless position enough. The moon was sinking, and that darkest hour of the night approached which is followed by dawn, just as sorrow is succeeded by consolation, and death by immortality. The breeze struck damp and chill on her unprotected neck and bosom, for there had been no time to think of cloaks or shawls when she escaped, nor was the air sufficiently cold before midnight to remind her of such precautions. The surrounding jungle stirred and sighed faintly, yet sadly, in the night air. The waters of the deep lagoon, now darkening with a darkening sky, lapped drearily against their bank. Other noises were there none, for the rioters seemed to have turned back from the resistance offered by Slap-Jack with his comrades, and to have abandoned for the present their search in that direction. The seamen who guarded the defile were peering stealthily into the gloom, not a man relaxing in his vigilance, not a man stirring on his post. The only sounds that broke her solitude were the rest-

less movements of Bottle-Jack, and the groans that would not be suppressed. It was no wonder the Marquise shuddered.

She stooped over the old seaman, and took his coarse, heavy hand in hers. Even at such an extremity, Bottle-Jack seemed conscious of the contrast, and touched it delicately, like some precious and fragile piece of porcelain. "I fear you are hurt," said she, in his own language, which she spoke with the measured accent of her countrywomen. "Tell me what it is; I am not a bad doctor myself."

Bottle-Jack tried to laugh. "It's a fleabite, my lady," said he, setting his teeth to conceal the pain he suffered. "'Tis but a poke in the side after all, though them black beggars does grind their spearheads to an edge like a razor. It's betwixt wind and water, d'ye see, marm, if I may be so bold, and past caulking, in my opinion. I'm a fillin' fast, that's where it is, askin' your pardon again for naming it to a lady like you."

She partly understood him, and for the first time to-night the tears came into her eyes. They did her good. They seemed to clear her faculties and cool her brain. She examined the old man's hurt, after no small resistance on his part, and found a

deep wound between his ribs, which even her experience warned her must be mortal. She staunched it as well as she could, tearing up the lace and other trimmings of her dress to form a temporary bandage. Then she bent down to the lagoon to dip her coroneted handkerchief in water and lay it across his brow, while she supported his sinking frame upon her knees. He looked in her face with a puzzled, wandering gaze, like a man in a dream. The vision seemed so unreal, so impossible, so unlike anything he had ever seen before, Bottle-Jack began to think he had reached Fiddler's-Green at last.

The minutes dragged slowly on. The sky became darker, the breeze colder, and the strangely matched pair continued in the same position on the brink of the white lagoon, the Marquise dipping her handkerchief at short intervals, and moistening the sailor's mouth. It was all she could do for him, and like a faithful old dog, wounded to the death, he could only thank her with his eyes. More than once she thought he was gone, but as moment after moment crept by, so sad, so slow, she knew he was still alive.

Would it never be day? She could scarcely see him now, though his heavy head rested on her

knees, though her hand with the moistened handkerchief was laid on his very lips. At last the breeze freshened, sighing audibly through the tree-tops, which were soon dimly seen swaying to and fro against a pale streak of sky on the horizon. Bottle-Jack started and sat up.

"Stand by!" he exclaimed, looking wildly round. "You in the fore-chains! Keep your axe ready to cut away when she rounds to. Easy, lads! She'll weather it now, and I'll go below and turn in."

Then he laid his head once more on Madame de Montmirail's knees, like a child who turns round to go to sleep.

The grey streak had grown to a wide rent of pale green, now broadening and brightening into day. Ere the sky was yet flecked with crimson, or the distant tree-tops tinged with golden fire, the life of the whole jungle was astir, waking the discords of innumerable menageries. Cockatoos whistled, monkeys chattered, parrots screamed, mocking-birds reproduced these and a thousand other sounds a thousand-fold. All nature seemed renewed, exulting in the freshened energies of another day, but still the Marquise sat by the lagoon, pale, exhausted, worn out, motionless, with the dead seaman's head in her lap.



CHAPTER XX.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

“**B**UT, madame, I am as anxious as you can be! Independent of my own feelings—and judge if they be not strong—the brigantine should not lie here another hour. After last night’s work, it will not be long before a Spanish man-of-war shows herself in the offing, and I have no desire that our papers should be overhauled, now when my cruise is so nearly finished. I tell you, my dearest wish is to have it settled, and weigh with the next tide.”

Captain George spoke from his heart, yet the Marquise seemed scarcely satisfied. Her movements were abrupt and restless, her eyes glittered, and a fire as of fever burned in her cheeks, some-

what wasted with all her late excitement and suspense. For the first time, too, he detected silver lines about the temples, under those heavy black locks that had always seemed to him only less beautiful than her child's.

“Not a moment must be lost,” said she, “not a moment—not a moment,” and repeating her words, walked across the deck to gaze wistfully over the side on Port Welcome, with its white houses glistening in the morning sun. They were safe on board ‘The Bashful Maid,’ glad to escape with life from the successful revolt that had burned Montmirail West to the ground, and destroyed most of the white people's property on the island. Partly owing to its distance from the original scene of outbreak, partly from its lying under the very guns of the brigantine, of which the tonnage and weight of metal had been greatly exaggerated by the negroes, Port Welcome was yet standing, but its black population were keeping high holiday, apparently masters of the situation, and its white residents crept about in fear and trembling, not knowing how much longer they might be allowed to call their very lives their own. It had been a memorable night, a night of murder and rapine, and horror and dismay. Few escaped so well as

Madame de Montmirail and her daughter. None indeed had the advantage of such a rescue. The negroes who tracked them into the bush, and who had delayed their departure to appropriate such plunder as they could snatch from the burning house, or to drink from its cellars success to the revolt, only reached that defile through which the fugitives were guided by Fleurette after these had passed by. The disappointed pursuers were there received by a couple of shots from Slap-Jack and his shipmates, which drove them back in disorder, yelling, boasting, vowing vengeance, but without any thought of again placing themselves in danger from lead or steel. In the death of Hippolyte, the revolt had lost its chief, and became from that moment virtually a failure. The Coromantee was the only negro concerned really capable of directing such a movement, and when his leadership was disposed of by a rapid thrust from Captain George's rapier, the whole scheme was destined to fall to pieces of itself, after the reaction which always follows such disorders had taken place, and the habits of every-day life began to reassert themselves. In the mean time, the blacks had more congenial amusements in store than voluntary collision with an English boat's crew,

and soon desisted from a search through the jungle, apparently as troublesome and hazardous as a hunt for a hornet's nest.

By sunrise, therefore, Slap-Jack was able to draw off his party from their post, and fall back to where the Marquise sat watching by the dead seaman, on the brink of the lagoon. Nor was Bottle-Jack the only victim of their escape, for poor Fleurette had already paid the price of her fidelity with her life.

A strong reinforcement from 'The Bashful Maid,' led by her Captain in person, who had returned at once, after placing Cerise in safety, enabled Madame de Montmirail and her defenders to take the high road to Port Welcome in defiance of all opposition. They therefore rounded the lagoon at once, and proceeding by an easier route than that which her daughter followed, reached the quay at their leisure, thence to embark on board the brigantine unmolested by the crowds of rioters with whom the town was filled.

Therefore it was that Madame de Montmirail now found herself on the deck of 'The Bashful Maid,' urging with a strange persistency, unusual and even unbecoming in a mother, Captain George's immediate marriage to her child, who

was quietly sleeping off the night's fatigues below.

"There is the chapel, madame," said George, pointing to the little white edifice that stood between the lighthouse and the town, distinguished by a cross that surmounted its glistening roof, "and here is the bride, safe, happy, and I hope sound asleep beneath the very spot where we are standing. I know not why there should be an hour's delay, if indeed the priest have not taken flight. There must have been a prospect of martyrdom last night, which he would scarce wish to inspect too closely. Ah! madame, I may seem cold and undemonstrative, but if you could look into my heart, you would see how happy I am!"

His voice and manner carried with them a conviction not to be disputed. It probed the Marquise to the quick, and true to her character, she pressed the instrument deeper and deeper into the wound.

"You love her then, monsieur?" she said, speaking very clearly and distinctly through her set teeth. "You love her as a woman must be loved if she would be happy—unreservedly, with your whole heart?"

"I love her so well," he answered, "that I only ask to pass my life in contributing to her happiness. Mine has been a rude, wild career, in many scenes and many countries. I have lived *in* society and *out of* society, afloat and ashore, at bivouac fires and Court receptions, yet I have always carried the portrait of that one gentle loving face printed on my heart."

"I compliment you on your constancy," she answered rather bitterly. "Such gallants have been very rare of late both at the old and new Courts. You must have seen other women too, as amiable, as beautiful, who could have loved you perhaps as well."

Something like a sigh escaped her with the concluding sentence, but there is no egotist like a happy lover, and he was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to perceive it. Smiling in his companion's face, with the old honest expression that reminded her of what he had been as a boy, he took her hand and kissed it affectionately.

"Madame," said he, "shall I make you a frank avowal? Ever since I was a wild page at Versailles, and you were so kind to me, I have believed in Madame de Montmirail as my ideal of all that woman should be, and perhaps might

never have loved Cerise so well had she not resembled her mother."

The Marquise was not without plenty of self-command, but she wanted it all now. Under pretence of adjusting her glove, she snatched away the hand he held, that he might not feel it tremble, and forced herself to laugh while she replied lightly—

"You are complimentary, monsieur, but your compliments are somewhat out of date. An *old* woman, you know, does not like to be reminded of her age, and you were, yes, I honestly confess you were, a dear, mischievous, good-looking, good-for-nothing boy in that far-off time so long ago. But all this is nothing to the purpose. Let us send ashore at once to the priest. The ceremony may take place at noon, and I can give the young couple my blessing before wishing them good-bye."

"How, madame?" replied he, astonished. "You will surely accompany us? You will return with us to Europe? You will never trust yourself amongst these savages again, after once escaping out of their hands?"

"I shall be safe enough when the garrison has crossed the mountain," she answered, "and that

must be in a few hours, for they are probably even now on the march. Till then I will take refuge with the Jesuits on their plantation at Maria-Galante. I do not think all my people can have rebelled. Some of them will escort me faithfully as far as that. No, monsieur, the La Fiertés have never been accustomed to abandon a post of danger, and I shall not leave the island until this rising has been completely put down."

She spoke carelessly, almost contemptuously, but she scarcely knew what she said. Her actual thoughts, had she allowed herself to utter them, would have thus framed themselves: "Can there be anything so blind, so heartless, so self-engrossed—shall I say it?—so entirely and hopelessly *stupid* as a man?"

It was not for George to dispute her wishes. Though little given to illusions, he could scarcely believe that he was not dreaming now, so strange did it seem to have achieved in the last twelve hours that which had hitherto formed the one engrossing object of his life, prized, coveted, dwelt on the more that it looked almost impossible of fulfilment. There was but one drawback to his joy, one difficulty left, perplexing indeed, although simple, and doubly annoying because others of

apparently far greater moment had been surmounted. There was no priest to be found in Port Welcome! The good old Portuguese Curé who took spiritual charge of the white inhabitants, and such negroes as could be induced to pay attention to his ministering, had been nearly frightened out of his wits by the outbreak. This quiet meek old man, who, since he left his college forty years before, had never known an excitement or anxiety greater than a visit from his bishop or a blight in his plantain-ground, now found himself surrounded by swarms of drunken and infuriated slaves, yelling for his life. It was owing to the presence of mind shown by an old coloured woman who lived with him as housekeeper, and to no energy or activity of his own, that he made his escape. She smuggled him out of the town through a bye-street, and when he had once got his mule into an amble he never drew rein till he reached the Jesuits' establishment at Maria-Galante, where he found a qualified welcome and a precarious refuge. From this shelter, defenceless and uncertain as it was, nothing would induce him to depart till the colours of a Spanish three-decker were flying in the harbour, and ere such an arrival could restore confidence to the colony it would behave 'The

Bashful Maid' to spread her wings and flee away.

Captain George was at his wits' end. In such a dilemma he bethought him of consulting his second in command. For this purpose he went below to seek Beaudésir, and found him keeping guard at the cabin-door within which Mademoiselle de Montmirail was reposing, a post he had held without stirring since she came on board before dawn, and was confided by the Captain to his care. He had not spoken to her, he had not even seen her face; but from that moment he had exchanged no words with his comrades, standing as pale, as silent, and almost as motionless as a statue. He started violently when the Captain spoke, and collected his faculties with an obvious effort. George could not but observe his preoccupation.

"I am in a difficulty," said the latter, "as I have already told you more than once. Try and comprehend me. I do not often ask for advice, but I want yours now."

"You shall have it at any cost," replied the other. "Do not I owe everything in the world to you?"

"Listen," continued George. "The young lady

whom my honest fellows rescued last night, and whom I brought on board, is—is—Mademoiselle de Montmirail herself.”

“I know—I know,” answered Beaudésir, impatiently. “At least, I mean you mentioned it before.”

“Very likely,” returned the Captain, “though I do not remember it. Well, it so happens, you see, that this is the same young lady—the person—the individual—in short, I have saved the woman of all others who is most precious to me in the world.”

“Of course—of course,” repeated Beaudésir, impatiently, “she cannot go back — she *shall* not go back amongst those wretches. She must stay on board. You must take her to Europe. There should be no delay. You must be married—now—immediately—within two hours—before we get the anchor up.”

He seemed strangely eager, restless, excited. Without actually acknowledging it, George felt instinctively that something in his friend’s manner reminded him of the Marquise.

“There is a grave difficulty,” said the Captain. “Where can we find a priest? That fat little Portuguese who looked like a guinea-pig is sure

to have run away, if the negroes have not cut his throat."

The other reflected, his pale face turning paler every moment. Then he spoke, in a low determined voice—

"My Captain, there is a Society of Jesuits on the island : I know it for certain ; do not ask me why. I have never failed you, have I ? Trust me yet this once. Order a boat to be manned ; I will go ashore instantly ; follow in an hour's time with a strong guard ; bring your bride with you ; I will undertake that everything shall be ready at the chapel, and a priest in waiting to perform the ceremony."

George looked him straight in the face. "You are a true friend," said he, and gave him his hand. The other bent over it as if he would have put it to his lips, and when he raised his head again his eyes were full of tears. He turned away hastily, sprang on deck, and in five minutes the boat was lowered and Beaudésir over the side.

George tapped humbly at the cabin door, and a gentle face, pale but lovely, peeped out to greet him. After his whisper the face was anything but pale, and although the little monosyllabe 'No'

was repeated again and again in that pleading, yielding tone which robs the negative of all its harshness, the boon he begged must have been already nearly accorded if there be any truth in the old Scottish proverb which affirms that "Nineteen nay-says make half a grant."

In less than two hours the bridal procession was formed upon the quay, guarded by some score of stalwart, weatherbeaten tars, and presenting an exceedingly formidable front to the crowds of grinning negroes who were idling in the sun, talking over the events of the past night, and congratulating themselves that no such infliction as field-work was ever to be heard of in the island again.

It was a strange and picturesque wedding, romantic enough in appearance and reality to have satisfied the wildest imagination. Smoke-Jack and certain athletic able seamen marched in front; Slap-Jack and his foretop-men brought up the rear. In the centre walked the Marquise and her daughter, accompanied by the bridegroom. Four deep on each side were the special attendants of the bride, reckless in gait, free in manner, bronzed, bearded, broad-shouldered, and armed to the teeth, yet cherishing perhaps as deep a devotion for her

whom they attended to the altar as could have been entertained by the fairest bevy of bride's-maids that ever belonged to her own sex.

Cerise was very grave and very silent; happy indeed beyond expression, yet a little frightened at the extent as at the suddenness of her own happiness.

It seemed so strange to be besieged, rescued, carried off by a lover, and married to him, all within twenty-four hours. The Marquise, on the contrary, was gay, talkative, brilliant, full of life and spirits; more beautiful too than usual, in the bright light of that noonday sun. Slap-Jack, who considered himself no mean judge of such matters, was much distracted by the conflict in his own mind as to whether, under similar circumstances, he would have chosen the mother or the child.

Taking little notice of the crowd who followed at a respectful distance, having received from the free-handed sailors several very intelligible hints not to come too near, the bridal procession moved steadily through the outskirts of the town and ascended the hill on which the chapel stood.

Halting at its door, the crew formed a strong guard to prevent interruption, and the principal performers, accompanied only by Smoke-Jack,

Slap-Jack, and the Marquise, entered the building. There were flowers on the altar, with wax tapers already lighted, and everything seemed prepared for the ceremony. A priest, standing with his back to them, was apparently engaged in putting a finishing touch to the decorations when they advanced. Cerise, bewildered, frightened, agitated, clung to her mother's arm. "Courage, my child," said the Marquise, "it will soon be over, and you need never do this again !"

There was something in the voice so hard, so measured, so different from its usual tone, that the girl glanced anxiously in her face. It betrayed no symptoms of emotion, not even the little flutter of maternal pride and anxiety natural to the occasion. It was flushed, imperious, defiant, and strangely beautiful. Slap-Jack entertained no longer the slightest doubt of its superiority to any face he had ever seen. And yet no knightly visor, no Eastern *yashmak* ever concealed its real wearer more effectually than that lovely mask which she forced to do her bidding, though every muscle beneath was quivering in pain the while.

Nor was the Marquise the only person under this consecrated roof who curbed unruly feelings with a strong and merciless hand. That priest,

with his back to the little congregation, adjusting with trembling gestures the sacred symbols of his faith, had fought during the last hour or two such a battle as a man can only fight once in a lifetime ; a battle that, if lost, yields him a prey to evil without hope of rescue ; if won, leaves him faint, exhausted, bleeding, a maimed and shattered champion for the rest of his earthly life. Since sunrise he had wrestled fiercely with sin and self. They had helped each other lustily to pull him down, but he had prevailed at last. Though one insuperable barrier already existed between himself and the woman he loved so madly at the cost of his very soul, it was hard to rear another equally insurmountable, with his own hand ; but it would insure her happiness—he resolved to do it, and therefore he was here.

So when Cerise and her lover advanced to the altar, and the Jesuit priest whom they had imagined to be a stranger from Maria-Galante turned round to confront them, in spite of its contracted features, in spite of its wan, death-like hue, they recognized him at once, and exclaimed simultaneously, in accents of intense surprise, “ Brother Ambrose ! ” and “ Beaudésir ! ”

The sailors, too much taken aback to speak,

gasped at each other in mute astonishment, nor did Slap-Jack, who had constituted himself in a manner director of the proceedings, recover his presence of mind till the conclusion of the ceremony.

If a corpse could be galvanized and set up in priest's robes to bless a loving couple whom Heaven has joined together, its benediction could scarcely be more passionless and mechanical than was that which Florian de St. Croix—the Brother Ambrose who had been the bride's confessor, the Beaudésir who had been the bridegroom's lieutenant—now pronounced over George Hamilton and Cerise de Montmirail. Not an eyelash quivered, not a muscle trembled, not a tone of emotion could be detected in his voice. Still young, still enthusiastic, still, though it was wild and warped and wilful, possessing a human heart, he believed honestly that he then bade farewell at once and for ever to earth and earthly things.

When they left the chapel, he was gone ; gone back, so said some negroes lounging in the neighbourhood, to the other Jesuits at Maria-Galante. They believed him to be a priest of that order, resident at their plantation, who had simply come across the island, and returned in the regular performance of his duty. They cheered him when he

emerged from a side door and departed swiftly through their ranks. They cheered the bridal party a few minutes later, leaving the chapel to re-embark. They even cheered the Marquise, when, after bidding them farewell, she separated from the others, and sought a house in the town, where Célandine had already collected several faithful slaves who could be trusted to defend her, and in the cellars of which refuge the Italian overseer was even then concealed. They cheered Slap-Jack more than any one, turning round to curse them, not without blows, for crowding in too close. Lighthearted and impressionable, they were delighted with the glitter, the bustle, the parade of the whole business, and thought it little inferior to the "bobbery" of the preceding night.

So Cerise and her husband embarked on board the brigantine without delay. In less than an hour the anchor was up, and with a following tide and a wind off-shore, 'The Bashful Maid' stood out to sea, carrying at least two happy hearts along with her, whatever she may have left behind.

Before sunset, she was hull-down on the horizon, but long after her white sails vanished their last gleam seemed yet to linger on the eyes of two

sad, wistful watchers, for whom, henceforth, it was to be a gloomier world.

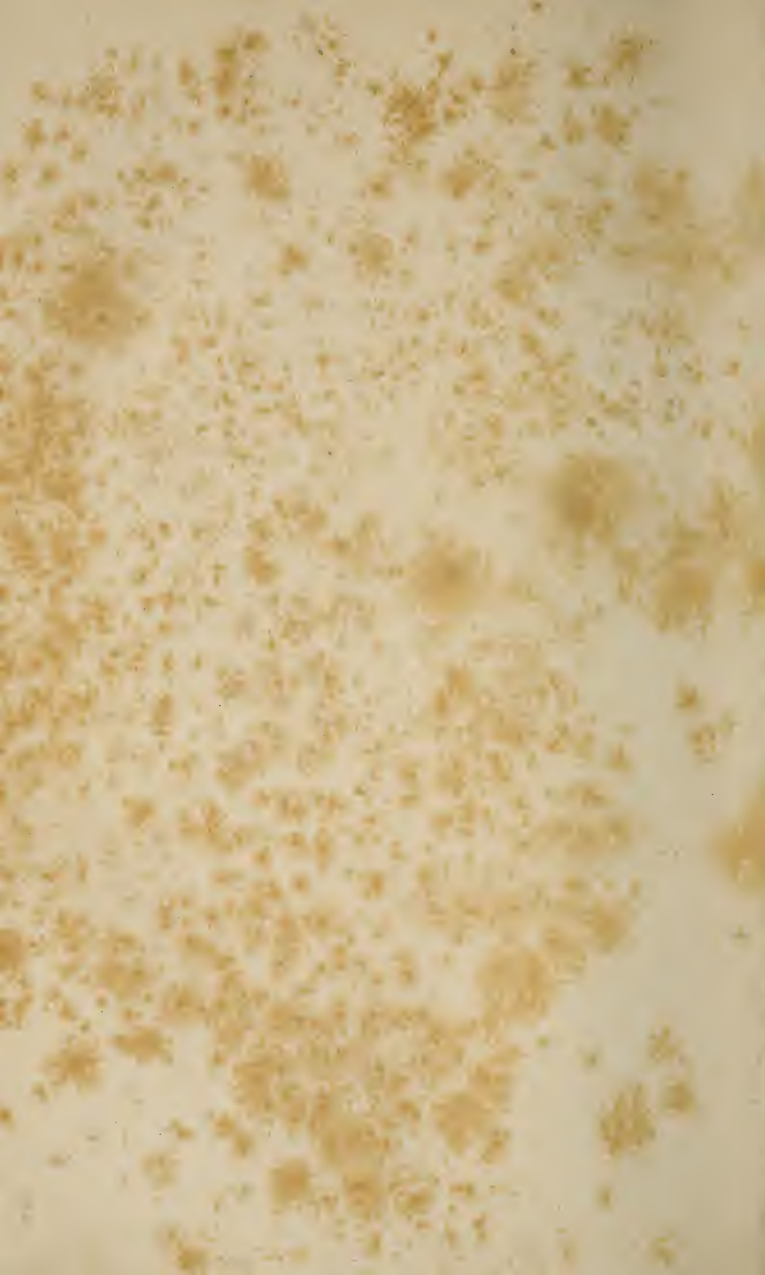
They knew not each other's faces, they never guessed each other's feelings, nor imagined how close a link between the two existed in that sunny speck, fading to leeward on the deep blue sea.

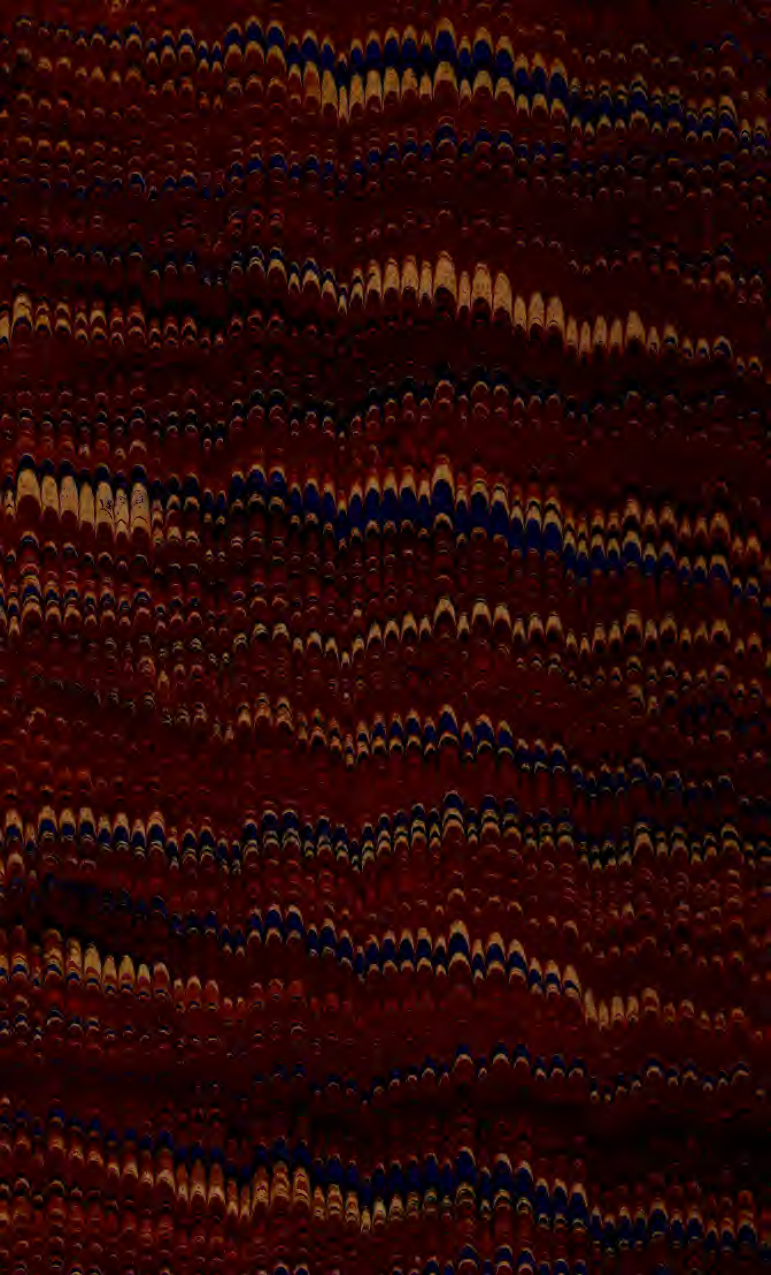
None the less longingly did they gaze eastward; none the less keenly did the Marquise de Montmirail and Florian de St. Croix feel that their loves, their hopes, their better selves—all that brightened the future, that enhanced the past, that made life endurable—was gone from them in the Homeward Bound.

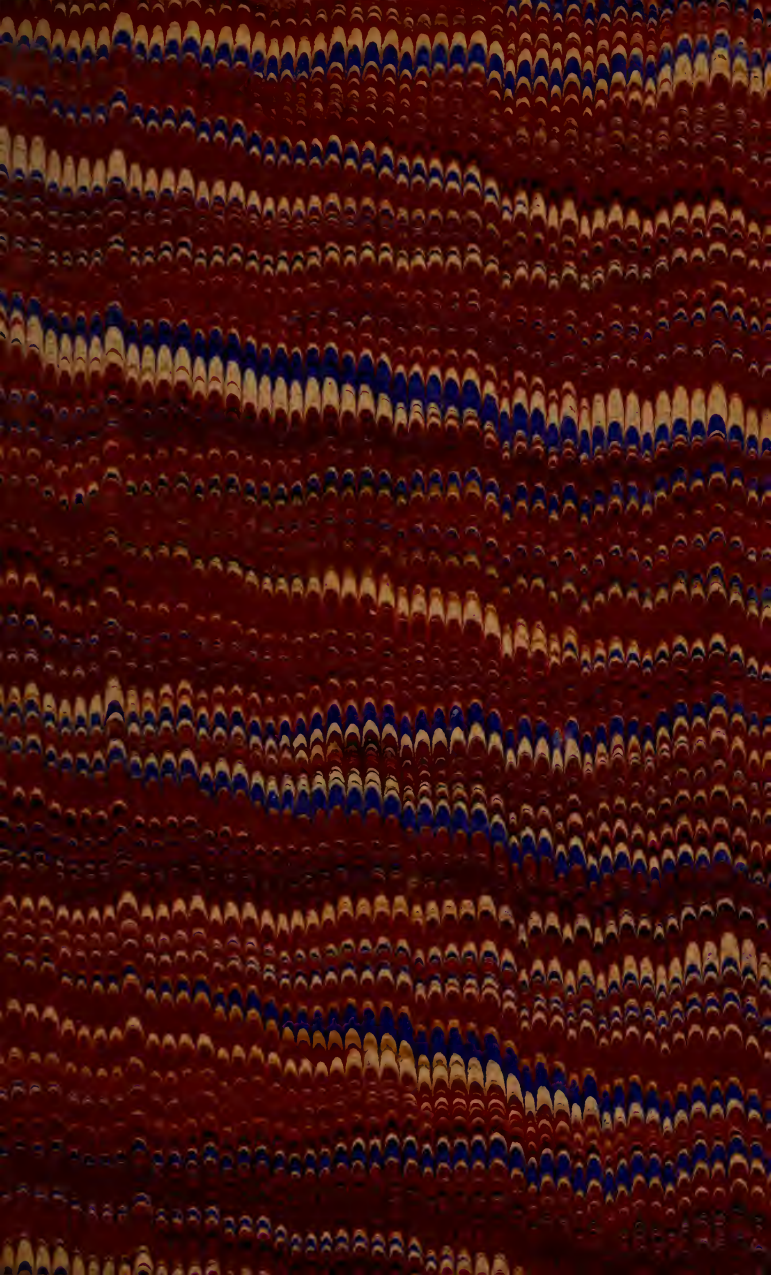
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